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THE EVOLUTION OF EVANGELICAL SOCIO-POLITICAL APPROACHES  
IN CONTEMPORARY CHINA (1980S-2010S)

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Doctor of Philosophy  
The University of Edinburgh  
2019



## DECLARATION

I confirm that this thesis presented for the degree of Doctor of Philosophy, has

- i) been composed entirely by myself
- ii) been solely the result of my own work
- iii) not been submitted for any other degree or professional qualification

A revised version of chapter II is forthcoming in 2020 in *Studies in World Christianity* as 'Samuel Lamb's Exhortation Regarding Eternal Rewards: A Socio-Political Perspective.'

Daniel Qin

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Date:



## ABSTRACT

This thesis explores the evolution of Evangelical socio-political approaches in contemporary China, arguing that Evangelicals in both the Three-Self church and the house churches have moved towards an increasing sense of social concern in the period from the 1980s to the 2010s. The period is divided into a former period (1980s to early-1990s) and a latter period (mid-1990s to 2010s). The late 1970s was the beginning of the Reform and Opening Up policy, which brought about a relatively open socio-political context and led to fast economic growth. Meanwhile, Protestant Christianity experienced fast growth in church numbers and Christian population. The mid-1990s marked a new phase of significant social change, which saw the growth of a socialist market economy partnered with moral decline and social injustice that continued to the 2010s. During this period, Protestant Christianity witnessed the rise of urban churches and growth of Christian intellectuals. The vast majority of Protestants during both periods would be considered Evangelical.

This thesis is a study of historical theology, focusing on four Evangelical church figures as case studies. Among them, in the former period, the house church pastor Lin Xiangao focuses on a pious Christian life and rewards in eternity while disengaging with the socio-political context. Different from Lin's approach, the Three-Self church leader Wang Weifan aspires to a Chinese Christianity integrated with traditional Chinese culture, taking a culture-driven engagement with the socio-political context. In the latter period, the house church leader Sun Yi emphasises the integrity and public nature of the church. He proposes to build the church as a model of moral integrity and organisational integrity, based on which the church should openly engage with the wider society. Contrastingly, the Three-Self church pastor Wu Weiqing emphasises a Christ-centred theology, by which he proposes faith in Christ as the solution to social injustice. Different from Sun's blueprint of church integrity, Wu directs the church's sense of social justice towards helping the poor through practical means like charity, social service and pastoral support.

The present study reveals three trends of evolution in the Chinese church. The first trend is of house church Evangelicals, moving from a privatised faith to an open engagement with society. The second trend is of Three-Self church Evangelicals, moving from a culture-driven engagement to a society-oriented approach. The third trend is of Three-Self church and house church Evangelicals moving towards an increasing social concern across the two periods. Nevertheless, this increasing social concern has encountered changes under the state's new political leadership in the second half of the 2010s, leaving the Evangelical's quest for socio-political engagement to face new uncertainties in the near future.



## LAY SUMMARY

This thesis explores the evolution of Evangelical socio-political approaches in contemporary China, arguing that Evangelicals in both the Three-Self church and the house churches have moved towards an increasing sense of social concern in the period from the 1980s to the 2010s. The period is divided into a former period (1980s to early-1990s) and a latter period (mid-1990s to 2010s). The late 1970s was the beginning of the Reform and Opening Up policy, which brought about a relatively open socio-political context and led to fast economic growth. Meanwhile, Protestant Christianity experienced fast growth in church numbers and Christian population. The mid-1990s marked a new phase of significant social change, which saw the growth of a socialist market economy partnered with moral decline and social injustice that continued to the 2010s. During this period, Protestant Christianity witnessed the rise of urban churches and growth of Christian intellectuals. The vast majority of Protestants during both periods would be considered Evangelical.

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## I. INTRODUCTION

A century after Robert Morrison brought the Protestant message to China in the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, evangelism had remained the primary concern of Protestant missionaries and Christians in China. However, from the Boxer Rebellion (1899) to the May Fourth Movement (1919) and the anti-Christian movement in the 1920s, Christianity was increasingly faced with a context of social and political turmoil, in which Chinese thinkers, both inside and outside the church, started to address and reflect on Christianity. Among Protestants, significant and varied attempts to construct Chinese theology were made according to the various concerns of the time.<sup>1</sup> While there existed a spectrum of approaches, Protestants in the 1920s and 1930s were often divided as either ‘fundamentalists’ or ‘modernists,’ based on the imported American terminology. While the fundamentalist-modernist controversy continued to shape the discourse in the 1950s, Chinese Protestants found themselves in the People’s Republic of China (PRC) ruled by the Chinese Communist Party (CCP).<sup>2</sup> Within this context, some Christian leaders, with Wu Yaozong (also known as Y.T. Wu) as a key figure, embraced socialist China, approached the Communist

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<sup>1</sup> Samuel D. Ling introduces and discusses the theologies of liberals, including Zhao Zichen, Wu Leichuan and Xu Baoqian during 1919-1937. See Samuel D. Ling, ‘The Other May Fourth Movement: The Chinese “Christian Renaissance,” 1919-1937’ (PhD diss., Temple University, 1981).

Lian Xi explores the theologies and practice of the more conservative Protestant figures, including Wei En-bo, founder of the True Jesus Church (*Zhen Yesu Jiaohui*), Jing Dianying, founder of the Jesus Family (*Yesu Jiating*), Wang Mingdao, an independent itinerant preacher and founder of the Christian Tabernacle (*Jidutu Huitang*) in Beijing, the itinerant evangelist Song Shangjie (John Sung), Watchman Nee (Ni Tuosheng), founder of the Little Flock (*Xiao Qun*). Lian Xi, *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China* (Yale: Yale University Press, 2010).

<sup>2</sup> In the present thesis, when ‘China’ is mentioned in the post-1949 context, it refers to the PRC.

regime and established the state-sponsored Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM). Meanwhile, other Christians, with Wang Mingdao as the most well-known fundamentalist figure, refused to join the TSPM and criticised Wu and his colleagues as modernists and a ‘party of the unbelievers’ (*buxin pai*).<sup>3</sup> Contrary to Wu’s active engagement with socialist China, Wang focused his interest in ministry and disengaged with the socio-political context.<sup>4</sup> However, during the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) when all church activities were banned, both Christian groups connected with the TSPM and those who rejected it went through oppression to various extents.

However, the start of the Reform and Opening Up policy in the late 1970s marked the beginning of a new socio-political context, which featured a growing economy, a relatively open society and a lenient religious policy. At this time, the Chinese churches experienced a fast growth in numbers. Starting from the mid-1990s, Chinese Protestants witnessed the rise of churches in urban centres, development of Christian intellectuals and a changing context featuring moral decline and serious social issues. Moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, some Christians have

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<sup>3</sup> Wang Mingdao, ‘We, Because of Faith,’ trans. Frank W. Price, in *Documents of the Three-Self Movement*, ed. Francis P. Jones (New York: National Council of The Churches of Christ in The U.S.A. 1963): 103, 104, 112. Wang also explains, ‘We will not unite in any way with these unbelievers, nor will we join any of their organizations. And even with true believers and faithful servants of God we can enjoy only a spiritual union. There should not be any kind of formal, organizational union, because we cannot find any teaching in the Bible to support it.’ Wang, ‘Because of Faith,’ 113-14.

<sup>4</sup> Wang Mingdao insists that Christians must avoid being involved in the affairs in the world, and the only reason for the Christian to live in the world is to lead other people to Christ. See Wu Liming, *Jidujiao Yu Zhongguo Shehui Bianqian* [*Christianity and Social Change in China*] (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council Ltd., 1997), 151.

come to express their theological ideas with increasing social concern.<sup>5</sup> Intentionally or not and in one way or another, the Chinese practitioners of the Christian faith, including both those in the Three-Self churches (registered churches, or TSPM churches) and those in the house churches (or unregistered churches),<sup>6</sup> have formed their own theological understandings in response to the changing socio-political context from the 1980s.

### 1.1 Research Topic, Scope and Limitations

The research topic of the present thesis is the evolution of Evangelical socio-political approaches in contemporary China. A socio-political approach refers to Chinese Evangelical Christians' view and way of engaging or disengaging with the socio-political context in China. The word 'socio-political' implies a combination of two interconnected aspects: the social and the political. While these two aspects can be studied separately with different purposes, they are combined as 'socio-political'

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<sup>5</sup> Tony Lambert describes the fast growth of Christian population in 1980s-1990s. See Tony Lambert, *China's Christian Millions* (Oxford: OMF, 2006), 31-35, 179-80.

Brent Fulton describes the growing urban church in China. See Brent Fulton, *China's Urban Christians: A Light That Cannot Be Hidden* (Eugene: Pickwick Publications, 2015), 9-11.

Alexander Chow describes social concern among Calvinist theology in urban China. See Alexander Chow, 'Calvinist Public Theology in Urban China Today,' *International Journal of Public Theology* 8, no. 2 (May 2014), 158-75.

<sup>6</sup> The term 'Three-Self church' will be used to refer to those local churches registered with the TSPM. It is adopted in the present thesis mainly because it is a literal translation of the common Chinese term '*sanzi jiaohui*.' From its origins, the TSPM has claimed to be based on the 'three-self' missiological concept of self-governing, self-supporting and self-propagating. However, its application has been more to serve its purposes like anti-imperialism and pro-patriotism. The term 'house church' will be used to refer to those local churches not registered with the TSPM. The term 'house churches' does not imply that they are necessarily meeting in houses. It is adopted in the present thesis simply because it is the term (*jiating jiaohui* in Chinese) widely used by the Christians in China. House churches are considered by the CCP as illegal according to Chinese law.

Regarding terms, Gerda Wielander has a discussion on the contentions with various terms like Three-Self or TSPM churches, house churches or unregistered churches. Gerda Wielander, *Christian Values in Communist China* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2013), 15-16.

in the present thesis in order to better describe Chinese Evangelicals' engagement with the Chinese context. This is because, as China is solely ruled by the CCP, the party-state plays a dominant role in the public space. On the one hand, while being restricted or burdened by church-state relations, Chinese Evangelicals have had an increasing interest and active role in the wider society. On the other hand, they are unable to engage the social aspect in isolation, as one not affected by the political aspect. In light of this, the word 'evolution' here, while having nothing to do with evolutionary or Darwinian theories in biological or social development, intends to describe the change, movement or development of Evangelical Christians' socio-political approach. 'Contemporary China' in this topic is focused on the period from the 1980s to the 2010s with the concern that this period has witnessed both the fast growth and development of Protestant Christianity, and the responsiveness of Evangelical Christians to a new and changing socio-political context in China.

This period is further divided into two, with the mid-1990s as a rough point of division. This division is based on the significant socio-political changes taking place at around the mid-1990s, which influenced the shape of Protestant Christianity. The former period was the early stage of the state's Reform and Opening Up Policy. Chinese churches began to re-emerge and develop as the religious policy became more open.<sup>7</sup> In the latter period, social unrest has become a more prevalent reality

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<sup>7</sup> Daniel H. Bays, *A New History of Christianity in China* (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell Publishing, 2012), 187-92.

due to increased severity in moral decline and social injustice.<sup>8</sup> Several elements may have contributed to the social shifts in the mid-1990s. Firstly, the socialist market economy continued to thrive without support from a proper legal system and efficacious moral guidance. The misuse of political power and economic resources by government officials and privileged groups has been a major cause of social injustice. As a matter of fact, a clear and huge wealth gap remains between the rich and the poor.<sup>9</sup> Secondly, urbanisation and the one-child policy had negative impacts upon society: endemic pre-marital sexual promiscuity, rising economic expectations towards a future spouse, and gender imbalance.<sup>10</sup> In the mid-1990s, the first generation of children born under the one-child policy became students at universities. As one set of parents and two sets of grandparents focused their attention and resources on the single child of a given family, these children formed a strong sense of the individual. As for those rural Chinese with multiple children, when they migrated to urban centres looking for jobs and incomes, many of their left-behind children were raised by grandparents or extended families. The absence of these children's parents during their upbringing may then have a negative influence on their adult lives. Thirdly, after the Tiananmen Square incident in 1989, China's younger generation lost their dream of constructing an ideal country and

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<sup>8</sup> Brent Fulton explains that the spiritual battleground of the church shifted from oppression to 'materialism, secularism and moral decline.' See Fulton, 48. Another source on social unrest is Christian Göbel and Lynette H. Ong, *Social Unrest in China* (London: Europe China Research and Advice Network, 2012).

<sup>9</sup> Feng Hua, 'Yixie Pinzhe Cong Zanshi Pinkun Zouxian Kuadai Pinqiong' [Some of the Poor Move from Temporary Poverty to Cross-Generation Poverty], *Renmin Ribao* [People's Daily], 23 January 2015.

<sup>10</sup> Fulton, 12-14.



society. While many people turned their interest to a better personal life, a significant number of them turned to Christianity.<sup>11</sup> From this younger generation, the Chinese churches are receiving an increasing number of Christian intellectuals who offer deeper theological reflections on being more demonstrably relevant to their socio-political context.<sup>12</sup> Gradually, they speak more openly about socio-political issues.

Although the present study focuses on the period from the 1980s to the 2010s, the time period from the May Fourth Movement to the 1970s will serve as an important backdrop for this study. Since 1915, the New Culture Movement has shaped the thought and life of numerous Chinese people. When the May Fourth Movement broke out in 1919, some Chinese Christian scholars and leaders responded to the context by endeavouring to construct their own indigenous theology. After the Cultural Revolution, the phenomena of Christianity fever and cultural Christians during the 1980s and 1990s were explained by scholars like Edmond Tang and Alexander Chow as the second Chinese enlightenment, comparing it with the May Fourth Movement as the first Chinese enlightenment.<sup>13</sup> Besides a connection between the two enlightenments, there is also a connection to ecclesiastic history. From 1949 to the end of 1970s, Wu Yaozong's initiation of the

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<sup>11</sup> Yang Fenggang, 'Lost in the Market, Saved in McDonald's: Conversion to Christianity in Urban China,' *Journal for the Scientific Study of Religion* 44, no. 4 (December 2005): 435-37.

<sup>12</sup> Alexander Chow explains some of the intellectual Christians' discussion on D concepts like 'cultural mandate' and 'common grace,' and the church's participation in serving the civil society after the May 2008 earthquake in Sichuan province. Alexander Chow, *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018), 106.

<sup>13</sup> Edmond Tang, 'The Second Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and Christianity Today,' in *Identity and Marginality: Rethinking Christianity in North East Asia*, eds. Werner Ustorf and Toshiko Murayama (Frankfurt am Main; New York: Peter Lang, 2000), 55-70.

Alexander Chow, *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity* (New York, NY; Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan, 2013), 21-40.

TSPM and Wang Mingdao's rejection of it brought about a division of Chinese Protestant Christianity. This process of the division of the church due to different views and approaches toward the TSPM and the Communist regime continued to take effect after the 1970s. It was then that a clear division developed between churches which were willing to register with the TSPM, and those that chose not to register and were generally termed house churches. In view of these connections with pre-1980 history, a historical survey of these earlier periods may shed light on understanding the evolution of Evangelical socio-political approaches in the period from the 1980s to the 2010s.

In the present study of the evolution of Evangelical social-political approaches, mainland China is the geographical focus. Although Chinese culture or, in some sense, Confucian tradition, has shaped several East and Southeast Asian countries and regions, mainland China has acquired its own distinctive cultural characteristics due to decades of Communist rule. Considering the huge scale of Chinese Protestant Christianity, the diversity within Three-Self and house churches, and a proposed church type called 'a third church,'<sup>14</sup> it is impracticable to study the socio-political approaches of Protestants as a whole. Therefore, as the present study is not a general survey, it will focus on the socio-political approaches of four representative Evangelical church leaders particularly since the 1980s: Lin Xiangao (also known as Samuel Lamb; 1924-2013), Wang Weifan (1927-2015), Sun Yi (born 1961) and Wu Weiqing (born 1964). The focus on these leaders in the present study

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<sup>14</sup> Chow, 'Calvinist Public Theology,' 163.

is due to their influence among the two major groupings of churches, Three-Self churches and house churches. They come from various regions of China and, in view of their widespread influence, especially through print and digital media, and the high level of social mobility in contemporary China, they in some way represent important voices for the churches in mainland China. In addressing their socio-political approaches, the present study does not intend to include or discuss all of their theological insights. Instead, it will focus on their relevant views and ways of engaging or disengaging with the socio-political context.

The present study will focus on the socio-political approaches of Evangelicals from the 1980s. This is because from the 1980s to the 2010s, the vast majority of Protestant Christians have been Evangelical in theology. Though this study will not examine specific lay Christians, these leaders have had strong sway on lay Christians and are therefore representative voices. A focus on the Evangelical leaders will therefore help to provide a general picture of Chinese Protestantism.

## 1.2 Literature Review

For the purposes of this research, scholars' studies on Chinese Christian theology from the May Fourth Movement to the 2010s can be separated into two periods: (1) From the May Fourth Movement to the 1960s and (2) from the 1980s to the 2010s. The period of the Cultural Revolution (1966–1976) is not included since little is known about religion in China at that time. As for the period from 1949 to the mid-1960s, although the Chinese churches continued to exist, the most prominent theological expressions can mainly be found among those Christians affiliated with

the TSPM. During that period, little is known about the theology of other Christians except for their conservative theological stand and their experience of oppression.

### 1.2.1 Pre-Cultural Revolution Studies

A large number of studies have been produced which look at the general situation in China in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. A selection of key studies is worth highlighting here to better understand the academic field as it stands. Lin Ronghong's book *Zhonghua Shenxue Wushi Nian 1900-1949*<sup>15</sup> provides an overall view and analysis of the theological movement in a time of turmoil and social change. In contrast to this more general survey, Wu Liming, in *Jidujiao Yu Zhongguo Shehui Bianqian*,<sup>16</sup> focuses on specific examples of theologians who engaged with the dramatic changes in China during this time: Zhao Zichen (also known as T.C. Chao), Wu Yaozong, Wang Mingdao, Xu Baoqian, and Wu Leichuan. Two further studies examine theological responses during this period with respect to specific intellectual challenges. Yamamoto Sumiko, in *History of Protestantism in China: The Indigenization of Christianity*,<sup>17</sup> describes the growth and institutionalisation of Chinese Christianity and intellectual trends among China's Protestant leaders in the historical period of 1807-1937 with most space given to 1907-1937. Yamamoto introduces and interprets representative writings by figures like Cheng Jingyi, Wu Leichuan, Zhao Zichen and Wu Yaozong who had a concern

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<sup>15</sup> Lin Ronghong, *Zhonghua Shenxue Wushi Nian 1900-1949* [A Half Century of Chinese Theology 1900-1949] (Hong Kong: China Graduate School of Theology, 1998).

<sup>16</sup> Wu, *Jidujiao Yu Zhongguo Shehui*.

<sup>17</sup> Yamamoto Sumiko, *History of Protestantism in China: The Indigenization of Christianity* (Tokyo: Toho Gakkai Institute of Eastern Culture, 2000).

for indigenisation. Samuel D. Ling, in his PhD dissertation ‘The Other May Fourth Movement: The Chinese “Christian Renaissance” 1919-1937,’<sup>18</sup> describes the historical context of China and discusses the theologies of Zhao Zichen (during 1919-27), Wu Leichuan (during 1927-37) and Xu Baoqian (during 1927-37) as examples of Christian responses to the context. Ling comments that in their engagement in the intellectual formation of the May Fourth Movement, also termed the Chinese Renaissance, Chinese Christians responded to the issues of the day and became indigenous in their responses. In addition to these works focused on theological responses, there are two major studies describing the Chinese Protestants’ indigenous and unity movement. Jonathan Chao, in his PhD dissertation ‘The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement, 1919-1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movements in Modern China,’<sup>19</sup> proposes that the anti-Christian pressures of the time caused the rise of the Chinese indigenous church movement. Wang Xiaojing, in her PhD thesis entitled ‘The Church Unity Movement in Early-Twentieth Century China: Cheng Jingyi and the Church of Christ in China,’<sup>20</sup> explores the church unity movement among some of the Chinese churches in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century, particularly discussing Cheng Jingyi’s role in the movement and taking the Church of Christ in China as case study.

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<sup>18</sup> Ling, ‘The Other May Fourth Movement.’

<sup>19</sup> Jonathan Chao, ‘The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement, 1919-1927: A Protestant Response to the Anti-Christian Movements in Modern China’ (PhD diss., University of Pennsylvania, 1986).

<sup>20</sup> Wang Xiaojing, ‘The Church Unity Movement in Early-Twentieth Century China: Cheng Jingyi and the Church of Christ in China’ (PhD thesis, University of Edinburgh, 2012).

Among studies on Chinese theology in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, many have focused on Zhao Zichen, as Zhao is generally considered one of the most significant and context-focused Chinese theologians in the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Zhao is well known and studied for his concern for the indigenisation of Christianity in China. Besides the works mentioned above that include Zhao in their discussion, other major studies on Zhao include Winfried Glüer's *Zhao Zichen de Shenxue Sixiang*,<sup>21</sup> Ying Fuk-Tsang's *Xunsuo Jidujiao de Dutexing: Zhao Zichen Shenxue Lunji*,<sup>22</sup> Tang Xiaofeng's *Zhao Zichen Shenxue Sixiang Yanjiu*,<sup>23</sup> Chen Yongtao's *The Chinese Christology of T.C. Chao*,<sup>24</sup> and Daniel Hoi Ming Hui's *A Study of T.C. Chao's Christology in the Social Context of China (1920 to 1949)*.<sup>25</sup>

After the Communist take-over of China in 1949 until the 1960s, scholarly studies focused on the TSPM include Philip L. Wickeri's *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China's United Front*.<sup>26</sup> Studies also focused on the key TSPM leader Wu Yaozong, including a collection of essays, *Da Shidai de Zongjiao Xinyang: Wu Yaozong Yu Ershi Shiji*

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<sup>21</sup> Winfried Glüer, *Zhao Zichen de Shenxue Sixiang* [*The Theological Thought of T.C. Chao*], trans. Deng Zhaoming (Shanghai: China Christian Council, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Ying Fuk-Tsang (Xing Fuzeng), *Xunsuo Jidujiao de Dutexing: Zhao Zichen Shenxue Lunji* [*In Search of the Uniqueness of Christianity: Essays on T.C. Chao's Theology*] (Hong Kong: Alliance Bible Seminary, 2003).

<sup>23</sup> Tang Xiaofeng, *Zhao Zichen Shenxue Sixiang Yanjiu* [*A Study on the Theology of T.C. Chao*] (Beijing: Religion and Culture Press, 2006).

<sup>24</sup> Chen Yongtao, *The Chinese Christology of T.C. Chao* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017).

<sup>25</sup> Daniel Hoi Ming Hui, *A Study of T.C. Chao's Christology in the Social Context of China (1920 – 1949)* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2017).

<sup>26</sup> Philip L. Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground: Protestant Christianity, the Three-Self Movement, and China's United Front* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 1988).

*Zhongguo Jidujiao*, edited by Ying Fuk-Tsang.<sup>27</sup> For those who did not join the TSPM, studies have been directed to prominent church figures like Wang Mingdao in books such as Thomas Alan Harvey's *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church in China*.<sup>28</sup> Scholars' studies on Chinese Christianity in the period from 1949 to the 1960s have revealed two major approaches based on their response to the Communist regime: accommodation and resistance. The accommodational approach was initiated by Wu Yaozong and had its focus on Protestant Christianity's adaptation to the socialist state. The resistant approach was held by prominent church leaders, such as Wang Mingdao, and it generally led to a focus on the gospel and disengagement with the socio-political context.

### 1.2.2 Studies Spanning the Twentieth Century

Some studies cover the whole period from before the Cultural Revolution until the end of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Edmond Tang, in his article 'The Cosmic Christ - The Search for A Chinese Theology,'<sup>29</sup> analyses the efforts of indigenisation by Chinese theologians like Zhao Zichen, Wu Yaozong, and Bishop Ding Guangxun

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<sup>27</sup> Ying Fuk-Tsang, ed., *Da Shidai de Zongjiao Xinyang: Wu Yaozong Yu Ershi Shiji Zhongguo Jidujiao* [Abiding Faith for A Nation in Crisis: Y.T. Wu and Twentieth-Century Chinese Christianity] (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 2011).

<sup>28</sup> Thomas Alan Harvey, *Acquainted with Grief: Wang Mingdao's Stand for the Persecuted Church in China* (Grand Rapids: Brazos Press, 2002).

<sup>29</sup> Edmond Tang, 'The Cosmic Christ - The Search for A Chinese Theology,' *Studies in World Christianity* 1, no. 2 (1995): 131-42.

(also known as K.H. Ting).<sup>30</sup> Tang indicates that, in comparison with Zhao and Wu, who were figures in the pre-80s, Ding has made his theological concept of the cosmic Christ more constructive to the present time Chinese context. Alexander Chow, in his book *Theosis, Sino-Christian Theology and the Second Chinese Enlightenment: Heaven and Humanity in Unity*,<sup>31</sup> analyses the theologies of Watchman Nee, Zhao Zichen and Bishop Ding Guangxun. Through a discussion on the theologies of these three figures, Chow suggests a type of theology which takes into account the Chinese traditional mindset of heaven and humanity in unity and the theological orientation of God-human synergistically ‘co-working,’ which is developed in the Eastern Orthodox Church. Philip L. Wickeri provides a biography of Bishop Ding Guangxun in *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K.H. Ting and the Chinese Church*.<sup>32</sup> In the book, Wickeri describes many major events and times of social turmoil and depicts Bishop Ding as a religious leader and Christian theologian. Wickeri explains some of Bishop Ding’s theology by narrating his personal experience and calls for sympathy for his accommodational approach in various theological aspects. The historian Lian Xi in *Redeemed by Fire: The Rise of Popular Christianity in Modern China*, addresses the history of Chinese Protestant Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>33</sup> He describes mainly the indigenous church

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<sup>30</sup> Ding was officially consecrated as bishop of Zhejiang by the Chinese Anglican Church (*Zhonghua Shenggonghui*) in 1955. Although Anglican missionaries were kicked out of the country after 1949 and the Chinese Anglican Church ceased functioning since 1958, Ding continued to be regarded as a bishop by some Chinese churches, especially those affiliated with the TSPM. Wickeri, *Reconstructing Christianity in China*, 125-30, 234.

<sup>31</sup> Chow, *Theosis*.

<sup>32</sup> Philip L. Wickeri, *Reconstructing Christianity in China: K.H. Ting and the Chinese Church* (Maryknoll: Orbis Books, 2008).

<sup>33</sup> Lian, *Redeemed by Fire*.



movements and prominent independent itinerant preachers before 1949 and the Protestant revivals in the post-Cultural Revolution era. As can be seen from the work of Tang, Chow and Wickeri, Bishop Ding Guangxun has been studied in works that span periods before and after the Cultural Revolution, and Lian's work provides rather a general history of Protestant Christianity in the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

### 1.2.3 Post-Cultural Revolution Studies

Several sinologists, China watchers and scholars of Sino-Christian theology have produced significant works on Chinese Christianity and theology after the end of the Cultural Revolution. Among them, Fredrik Fällman, in *Salvation and Modernity: Intellectuals and Faith in Contemporary China*,<sup>34</sup> describes and interprets the phenomenon of 'cultural Christians,' with particular reference to the thinker Liu Xiaofeng. The book is the first major study of contemporary Chinese Christian intellectuals in English language. Fällman emphasises the importance of Christian thought in the first third of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and discusses how cultural Christians updated the intellectual scene through the 1980s and the 1990s. In the central section of the book, Fällman traces the aspects of Liu's theology. In the section on '*Hanyu shenxue (Sino-Theology)*,' he claims that more and better theology is being done by Chinese academics, like Liu Xiaofeng, He Guanghu, Yang Huilin and Zhuo Xinping, than by church theologians.<sup>35</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Fredrik Fällman, *Salvation and Modernity: Intellectuals and Faith in Contemporary China* (Lanham: University Press of America, 2004).

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 77-79.

In another major work *Christian Values in Communist China*,<sup>36</sup> author Gerda Wielander explores the social and political impact of Christianity in contemporary China. The book explores the themes of morality, love, charity, the online presence of Christians, and intellectuals and political transcendence. Another important theme of the book is how and to what extent Christians represent an example of public morality, especially in a post-socialist context where ideology has declined. It also introduces cultural Christians, public intellectual Christians, rights lawyers, entrepreneurs, rural and blue-collar pastors, and nanny and migrant worker Christians.

Cao Nanlai, in *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou*,<sup>37</sup> provides an ethnographic study of the unregistered house church community in the eastern coastal city of Wenzhou. Based on extensive fieldwork, Cao discusses how Christian entrepreneurs known as 'boss Christians,' the majority being Evangelical, negotiate with the local state and bring together their faith and business in the social space. Cao's work explores the case of Christians in Wenzhou, yet it does not offer a discussion on how the case of Wenzhou can be related to Christians from other parts of China.

Kang Jie, in *House Church Christianity in China: From Rural Preachers to Urban Pastors*,<sup>38</sup> while taking Linyi in Shangdong province as the geographical focus of her study, explores and discusses the impact of urbanisation and how house

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<sup>36</sup> Wielander, *Christian Values*.

<sup>37</sup> Cao Nanlai, *Constructing China's Jerusalem: Christians, Power and Place in Contemporary Wenzhou* (Stanford, Calif.: Stanford University Press, 2011).

<sup>38</sup> Kang Jie, *House Church Christianity in China: From Rural Preachers to Urban Pastors* (Cham: Springer International Publishing, 2016).

church pastors have experienced the transition of changing their role from rural preachers to urban pastors.

Brent Fulton, in *China's Urban Christians: A Light That Cannot Be Hidden*,<sup>39</sup> explores how the church in China perceives the challenges posed by its new urban context and examines its proposed means of responding to these challenges. Fulton discusses the shift of the church's battleground from harassment and oppression to spirituality against materialism, secularism, and moral decline. He also examines the church's concerns for social engagement, global missions, and the quest for and difficulty in church unity.

David Aikman, in the book *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power*,<sup>40</sup> provides a historical survey of Chinese Christianity, major church leaders, leadership training, persecution,<sup>41</sup> heresies and cults, house church networks, changes within the Chinese government and Roman Catholic Christianity in China. He has a focus on the house church movement and discusses how Christian faith has impacted the intellectual and academic leaders of China.

Tony Lambert, in his book *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*,<sup>42</sup> describes the social context and religious policy in the post-Cultural Revolution era and the rise and revivals of the Chinese church from the 1980s to the mid-1990s. In

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<sup>39</sup> Fulton, *China's Urban Christians*.

<sup>40</sup> David Aikman, *Jesus in Beijing: How Christianity Is Transforming China and Changing the Global Balance of Power* (Oxford: Monarch Books, 2003).

<sup>41</sup> The present thesis uses terms like 'oppression' and 'oppressed,' instead of 'persecution' and 'persecuted' unless when the latter terms are used by other authors in print.

<sup>42</sup> Tony Lambert, *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church* (Sevenoaks: Hodder and Stoughton Ltd, 1991).

another book *China's Christian Millions*,<sup>43</sup> Lambert describes Christian revivals from the 1980s to the 1990s according to different categories: revivals in Three-Self churches, in house churches, in regions like Henan and Anhui and among the tribes and among party members and intellectuals.

Ian Johnson in his book *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao*,<sup>44</sup> tells the stories of revivals from the 1980s among various religions, including Buddhism, Daoism, Chinese folk religion and Christianity. Ian includes Wang Yi's Early Rain Covenant Church as an example of Protestant revival and advocate of Calvinist theology.

Carsten T. Vala, in his book *The Politics of Protestant Churches and the Party-State in China: God Above Party?*<sup>45</sup> provides a general survey and discussion on how Chinese Christians have been dealing with state power in contemporary China. It provides particular and large-scale detailed information on the topic.

Karrie J. Koesel, in *Religion and Authoritarianism: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Consequences*,<sup>46</sup> gives a comparative study on authoritarianism and religion-politics relations in Russia and China. Drawing on ethnographic fieldwork in four cities in Russia and China, Koesel explains why and how local states and religious actors cooperate with one another and enable mutually beneficial relationships on material and symbolic bases. Although exploring the religion-politics relations in

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<sup>43</sup> Lambert, *China's Christian Millions*.

<sup>44</sup> Ian Johnson, *The Souls of China: The Return of Religion After Mao* (New York: Pantheon Books, 2017).

<sup>45</sup> Carsten T. Vala, *The Politics of Protestant Churches and the Party-State in China: God Above Party?* (London: Routledge, 2017).

<sup>46</sup> Karrie J. Koesel, *Religion and Authoritarianism: Cooperation, Conflict, and the Consequences* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014).

China, Koesel's work does not focus on Christian theology since it is a work based on ethnographic fieldwork.

Marie-Eve Reny, in *Authoritarian Containment: Public Security Bureaus and Protestant House Churches in Urban China*,<sup>47</sup> identifies and explains 'containment' as a strategy of Public Security Bureaus in urban China to facilitate the resilience of the regime by allowing unregistered Protestant congregations to operate under some restrictions. Based on fieldwork with a focus on 'Presbyterian' churches in large cities, Reny also explains how a strategy of containment has influenced church-state relationships in various ways. Reny's work focuses on exploring religious policy and church-state relationships instead of discussing Chinese Christians' theology.

The book *China's Reforming Churches: Mission, Polity and Ministry in the Next Christendom*,<sup>48</sup> edited by Bruce P. Baugus, is a collection of essays on the history of Presbyterianism and its development in contemporary China. The book is focused on the history and development of Reformed theology and Presbyterianism among Chinese Protestant Christians.

Khek Gee Lim edits the book *Christianity in Contemporary China: Social-Cultural Perspectives*,<sup>49</sup> which includes discussions mainly on Chinese Christianity's relationship with Chinese civil society and Chinese culture.

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<sup>47</sup> Marie-Eve Reny, *Authoritarian Containment: Public Security Bureaus and Protestant House Churches in Urban China* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2018).

<sup>48</sup> Bruce P. Baugus, ed., *China's Reforming Churches: Mission, Polity and Ministry in the Next Christendom* (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014).

<sup>49</sup> Khek Gee Lim, ed., *Christianity in Contemporary China: Social-Cultural Perspectives* (Abingdon, Oxon; New York: Routledge, 2017).

Alexander Chow, in *Chinese Public Theology: Generational Shifts and Confucian Imagination in Chinese Christianity*,<sup>50</sup> explores and discusses a tradition of public theology, its continuous influence in history, and its growing voice in contemporary China. He also discusses the development of a Chinese public theology in various aspects.

Besides the major works of sinologists, China watchers and scholars of Sino-Christian theology, there are some popular magazines on Sino-Christian theology and Christianity. *Jiaohui (Church China)*,<sup>51</sup> with articles written from inside and outside of China, is concerned with church planting and developing in China, internal relations between different churches and the relationship between the churches and society. *Ai Yan (The Banquet)*,<sup>52</sup> founded by a pastor of Beijing house church, gathers a number of leading intellectuals as authors of its articles and targets house church Christians as its main readers. *Mai Zhong (Wheat Seeds)*, founded by Ezra Pan (She He), a graduate from the Christian Witness Theological Seminary in California, aims to contribute to the literature on Wenzhou churches and directs itself to all churches in China.<sup>53</sup> It publishes Christian literature, including songs, poems, stories, and essays concerning Chinese Christian traditions, problems within the churches, and issues of church planting and growth, rather than simply evangelistic material. All three of these magazines have their publications online and sometimes have printed copies distributed in addition. *Fuyin Shibao (Gospel Times)*<sup>54</sup> is an

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<sup>50</sup> Chow, *Chinese Public Theology*.

<sup>51</sup> <https://churchchina.org/>.

<sup>52</sup> <http://www.aiyan.org/>.

<sup>53</sup> <http://www.wheatseeds.org/>.

<sup>54</sup> <http://www.fuyinshibao.cn/>.

online magazine written and maintained mainly by young Chinese university graduates. Its content mainly includes current affairs and general interest stories with a particular focus on Christian life and experience in China today.

Some well-circulated journals are also published in China. Among them, a number are associated with the TSPM and the CCC: *Tian Feng* is published by the *lianghui* (the two bodies of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China Christian Council), *Jinling Shenxue Zhi* is published by Nanjing Union Theological Seminary (NUTS, *Jinling Xiehe Shenxueyuan*), the flagship seminary of the CCC, and *Chinese Theological Review* is published by the Amity Foundation, an NGO established by Bishop Ding Guangxun. In Britain, the *China Study Journal* was an academic journal publishing articles on religion and religious policy in China, but it ceased publication in 2009. Its research articles were written mainly by Chinese researchers with empirical studies of rural and urban Christianity and developments in Sino-Christian theology.

Apart from the above-mentioned literature, a number of documents produced by the PRC and the CCP on religious policy are worth noting in the context of the present study. They include various versions of the PRC's Constitution (1954, 1975, 1978, 1982), which contain articles on religious policy. The multiple versions of China's Constitution indicate its instability, which then weakens, even deprives, the authority that a constitution should have. Yet, the rationale is that the PRC's Constitution should reflect the CCP's understanding and policy, which have been changing over time. In terms of religious policy, the 1954 Constitution includes an article stating citizens' freedom of religious belief. However, under the influence of

the Cultural Revolution, the 1975 and 1978 versions of the Constitution state citizens' freedom of religious belief and freedom of not believing in religion and propagating atheism. In the 1982 Constitution, the article resumes the 1954 version of citizens' freedom of religious belief. Philip L. Wickeri has helpfully shown that Li Wei-han, through his explanations like those in the 'five characteristics of religion,' was influential in shaping the PRC's religious policy in the 1950s and some of the key clauses in the Constitution until the 1980s.<sup>55</sup>

For the Reform Era, 'The Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Questions during Our Country's Socialist Period' (*guanyu woguo shehui zhuyi shiqi zongjiao wenti de jiben guandian he jiben zhengce*), also known as 'Document 19,' was issued by the CCP in 1982 and offered further guidelines for the CCP's approach to religion. Compared to the 1982 Constitution's brief article on freedom of religious belief, the 'Document 19' bore great significance by offering further guidelines for the CCP's religious policy in the following decades. After 'Document 19,' two other documents were issued by the PRC in 1994: 'Regulations on the Administration of Places and Sites for Religious Activities' (*zongjiao huodong changsuo guanli tiaoli*) and 'Rules on the Administration of Religious Activities of Foreigners within the Territory of the People's Republic of China' (*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jingnei waiguoren zongjiao huodong guanli guiding*). These two documents were issued to offer detailed and practical provisions for the policy of religious freedom. The former was superseded in 2005 by the 'Regulation on

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<sup>55</sup> Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground*, 83-84, 92-106.



Religious Affairs' (*zongjiao shiwu tiaoli*), which had a broader scope, including further provisions on religious organisations, schools, places and sites, personale, activities, properties and legal liability.<sup>56</sup> Yet, the 'Regulation on Religious Affairs' was amended in 2018. The amended version of the Regulation highlights sinicisation of religion and addresses rising issues like infiltration of foreign religions, religious extremism, online religious issues, religious commercialisation, illegal religious activities, issues caused by people migration, intertest disputes among religious organisations.<sup>57</sup> Regarding the amended version, Beatrice K. F. Leung comments that it came 'with more sophisticated control and monitor to the very detailed degree,' and the CCP thus 'sets a smaller frame for religious activities while it extends its firmer control into religious matters.'<sup>58</sup>

For the period since the 1980s, many studies, including those conducted by Edmond Tang, Alexander Chow and Philip L. Wickeri, have been directed to Bishop Ding Guangxun. This may be because Bishop Ding published many writings and had a significant political and religious role as the leader of *lianghui*. However, the theology of other church figures has not received satisfactory attention. For example, another Three-Self church leader, Wang Weifan, has been productive in writing but has received little study apart from Yuan Yijuan's book *Shengsheng Shenxue: Wang*

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<sup>56</sup> For a discussion on the PRC's religious policy from the 1950s to the Hu Jintao era with reference to particular documents on religious policy, see Beatrice Leung, 'China's Religious Freedom Policy: The Arts of Managing Religious Activities,' *China Quarterly*, no. 184 (December 2005): 894-913.

<sup>57</sup> 'Xin Xiuding "Zongjiao Shiwu Tiaoli" Xuexi Jiedu' [Review on the Amended Regulation on Religious Affairs], Hubei Medical University, 30<sup>th</sup> October 2018, <http://dwtzb.hbmu.edu.cn/info/1065/1598.htm>.

<sup>58</sup> Beatrice K.F. Leung, 'Xi Jinping's Religious Freedom Policy vs Human Rights,' *Contemporary Chinese Political Economy and Strategic Relations* 4, no. 2 (July/August 2018): 373-74.

*Weifan Shenxue Sixiang Yanjiu*,<sup>59</sup> and a collection of essays *Gengfu Zhi, Chizi Xin: Wang Weifan Sixiang yu Shigong zhi Yanjiu*, edited by Kevin Xiyi Yao and Song Jun.<sup>60</sup> Yuan provides a general survey of Wang's theology and explains it as being influenced by traditional Chinese culture, Western theology, traditional Chinese theology and Marxism. The essay collection in the book edited by Yao and Song provides discussions on Wang Weifan's thoughts and ministry in areas like Chinese theology, scripture interpretation, social concern and spirituality. Besides Wang Weifan, among house churches, another significant church figure Lin Xiangao has become well known even outside China. However, the few writings about him are written at a popular level, mostly about his story and ministry rather than his theology. One of the examples is Ken Anderson's *Bold as A Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lamb and the Underground Church of China*<sup>61</sup> in which Anderson provides a biography of Lin, describes the story of his suffering for the Christian faith, and depicts the experience and growth of Chinese house churches in times of oppression.

The major works done by scholars tend to focus on intellectuals being either Chinese academics or church theologians. Besides this focus, Wielander, Cao, Kang, Fulton and Aikman in one way or another explore the practical dimensions of the Chinese churches, while referring very little to the contemporary theology of Chinese

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<sup>59</sup> Yuan Yijuan, *Shengsheng Shenxue: Wang Weifan Shenxue Sixiang Yanjiu* [Ever-Generating Theology: A Study on the Theology of Wang Weifan] (Beijing: Jincheng Press, 2010).

<sup>60</sup> Kevin Xiyi Yao and Song Jun, eds., *Gengfu Zhi, Chizi Xin: Wang Weifan Sixiang yu Shigong zhi Yanjiu* [A Watchman Vigilant in Spirit and Pure in Heart: The Study on the Thought and Ministry of Wang Weifan] (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, 2015).

<sup>61</sup> Ken Anderson, *Bold as A Lamb: Pastor Samuel Lamb and the Underground Church of China* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1991).

church ministers. Vala explores Chinese Christians' practical approach or methods of dealing with the state power. Koesel includes Chinese cases of cooperation between local state and religious actors under authoritarianism. Reny discusses containment as a strategy of resilience for the Public Security Bureaus and how it has affected church-state relationships. Baugus includes essays on the history and the contemporary development of Reformed theology and Presbyterianism in China. Lim includes discussions on the Chinese Christian's social concern. The author, editors and contributors of these five works somehow describe or indicate some of the theological ideas of Chinese Christians. But they tend to be either general surveys on practical approaches or collections of short essays. Compared to these works, Chow's *Chinese Public Theology* has its focus on public theology. Yet at the same time, it offers an overall study on the subject rather than a focused and comprehensive study on particular figures' theology. Apart from the different foci and interests of various works, it is noted that Fulton's *China's Urban Christians*, Aikman's *Jesus in Beijing*, Lambert's *China's Christian Millions* and *The Resurrection of the Chinese Church*, Johnson's *The Souls of China* and Anderson's *Bold as A Lamb* have been popular works as opposed to scholarly works in the sense that although they are widely read, they do not prioritise critical observations or analyses on the subjects. Nevertheless, though they are less than academic treatments, they offer important perspectives for understanding Christianity in China today. As for the magazines and journals, they tend to cover the theological writings of intellectuals and the faith practice of common Christians.

The above literature review indicates that neither the major works nor the magazines or journals have a focus on the theology of Evangelical church ministers in the post-1980s. Many studies have focused on Bishop Ding Guangxun, but since he was both a national church leader and a political leader, his writings may not accurately represent the theology of many local church ministers. This is also true to works that focus on Chinese academics and cultural Christians since they do not represent grassroots church ministers' theology. With regard to theological background, previous works have touched on Protestants in general, including liberals, Evangelicals, sectarians and cultural Christians. But none of the works have focused on the theology of Evangelicals. As for the post-1980s period, many works provide a general study of Christianity or the Chinese church. While a few studies include discussions on particular figures, the grassroots Evangelical figures have not been their focus. As the theology of Evangelical church figures like Lin Xiangao, Wang Weifan and their peers have received little or no study, and there have not been a focused study on the theology of more recent Evangelical church leaders like Sun Yi, Wu Weiqing and their contemporaries after the mid-1990s, it is the goal of the present study to explore the theology of grassroots Evangelical church figures in the 1980s-2010s, which has been largely neglected or is missing in previous literature. As the present study covers Evangelical figures from both Three-Self churches and house churches in the period 1980s-2010s, it will also be an exploration of the contours of the evolution of Chinese Evangelical theology.

### 1.3 Primary Research Question and Subsidiary Questions

The primary research question is: What evolutionary trends can be detected amongst Chinese Evangelical church leaders, within and outside of the TSPM, from the 1980s to the 2010s, with particular reference to their response to socio-political change? To address this question, this thesis will provide a focused study on four Chinese Evangelical church leaders: Lin Xiangao, Wang Weifan, Sun Yi and Wu Weiqing. The first two, one house church leader and one TSPM leader, straddle the period before and immediately after the Cultural Revolution until roughly the mid-1990s, whereas the latter two, also one house church leader and one TSPM leader, flourished in their work from the 1990s until the 2010s. There are several subsidiary research questions:

1. What were the dominant theological concerns of selected church leaders between the 1980s and the 2010s, and how have they stayed constant or changed?
2. To what extent and in what ways have the selected church leaders addressed the shifts in society?
3. Can a discernible difference be noticed between the theology of the two selected Three-Self church leaders and that of the two house church leaders?

The primary research question seeks to identify the trends of evolution in socio-political approaches with a focus on the four Chinese Evangelical church leaders, in conversation with their contemporaries, in addressing the socio-political context in contemporary China. The Reform and Opening Up Policy in the late-1970s marked the start of a new era of economic and social reform, and the socio-political change after the mid-1990s took place on a larger scale and in a form that is

significantly different from the previous period. While the mid-1990s marked significant socio-political change, it is necessary to explore the ways through which the selected figures, as well as some of their contemporaries, have responded to the socio-political context both before and after the mid-1990s and see if any trends of evolution of their socio-political approaches can be identified.

Kevin Xiyi Yao explains that the Chinese Evangelical tradition took shape in the 1930s-1940s when waves of Evangelical revivals took place and were led by Chinese itinerant evangelists and church leaders. Yao mentions the influence of overseas Evangelicalism and Evangelical missions like the China Inland Mission (CIM). Yet, during the Evangelical revivals in China in the 1930s-1940s, Chinese Evangelicals started playing significant leadership roles in evangelicalism, in the creation of new churches and church networks, and in articulating their own theology. Yao gives a working definition of the Chinese Evangelical tradition, which includes three basic elements: (1) upholding the authority of the Bible; (2) emphasising evangelism and (3) a Christocentric message.<sup>62</sup> By these basic elements, Chinese Evangelicals holdfast to *sola Scriptura*, emphasise conversion and evangelistic ministry, and preach Christ and his salvation as the centre of their message. Although Evangelicalism includes broad areas and diverse emphases, especially in the West where Evangelical Christianity has had a longer history, Yao's definition captures the foremost emphases of the Chinese Evangelical tradition. The

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<sup>62</sup> Kevin Xiyi Yao, 'Wang Weifan de Fuyin Zhuyi Sixiang' [Wang Weifan's Evangelical Thought], in Yao and Song, 4.

present thesis will adopt Yao's definition in defining Chinese Evangelicals. This definition will also be clarified in later chapters of the thesis.

The first subsidiary question seeks to examine the dominant theological concerns of these four church leaders over time. Their dominant theological concerns are either regarding a socio-political approach or will be interpreted to explain their socio-political approach. As the time span is divided into a former and a latter period, it is vital to explore what theological concerns have remained constant across the two periods. At the same time, as the context has changed significantly, it is also important to find out what has changed over time in their theological concerns.

The second subsidiary question aims to explore the extent and the ways in which these church leaders have addressed important shifts in society. The extent and the ways of engagement are two important elements in a given socio-political approach. The answer to this question will help to describe selected figures' socio-political approaches and reveal how their approaches may have been different from each other.

The third subsidiary question is assigned to explore any discernible difference between the theology of the leaders of Three-Self churches and that of the leaders of house churches. This question is highly relevant and meaningful in two senses. Firstly, as the CCP tries to maintain control over religious affairs, the selected church leaders' relationships with the *lianghui* may substantially affect their theological approach and expression. In view of this, finding a discernible difference will help to explain how church-state relationship has affected their socio-political approaches. Secondly, as the four selected figures are all Evangelical in theology, any difference

between their theologies will be helpful to explain a diversity of Chinese Protestant Christianity.

#### 1.4 Wider Significance of the Topic

The literature review indicates that the topic is significant in the sense that it provides a focused study on the theology of grassroots Evangelical church leaders, particularly their socio-political approaches from the 1980s to the 2010s. Apart from this significance, the topic will also provide explorations, discussions and insights in several areas, including Chinese Evangelical theology, the shift of socio-political context and the rise of urban churches.

##### 1.4.1 Chinese Evangelical Theology

Although the topic is about the evolution of Evangelical socio-political approaches, it also provides some examples of Chinese Evangelical theology through discussions on four representative Evangelical figures' dominant theological concerns. For example, the present study will explore theological concepts like Lin Xiangao's idea of the pious Christian life and eternal rewards, Wang Weifan's thought on a unified Chinese church and a Chinese theology integrated with Chinese culture, Sun Yi's understanding of the church's openness and integrity, and Wu Weiqing's view of a Christ-centred theology. While these ideas in one way or another reveal the representative figures' socio-political approaches, which is the focus of the present study, they also represent these figures' theological thinking in a broader sense of Evangelical theology. In other words, their theological ideas discussed in the present study can be understood and studied from other perspectives



instead of a socio-political perspective, and in broader fields like Evangelicalism and Chinese Evangelicalism.

Apart from the significance for studies from different perspectives and in broader fields, the present study's inclusion of figures from both the Three-Self church and house churches will also enable a fair representation of Chinese Evangelical theology. This fair representation will not be possible in a study of the Evangelical theology of either the Three-Self church or house churches. As the present study will reveal significant points of convergence between theology of both groups, namely, the Three-Self church and house churches, it also bears significance in presenting the vast majority of the Chinese Protestants as Evangelical, and this may provide some insights for studies like church unity in Chinese Protestant Christianity.

#### 1.4.2 Addressing the Shift of Socio-Political Context

The context in which the Chinese Christians live has significantly changed since the 1980s. Slogans like 'the new socialist China,' or 'socialist China,' have become unpopular even with the Communist government. Instead, as described by Gerda Wielander, the official discourse of the government first moved to constructing a 'harmonious society.'<sup>63</sup> While 'harmonious society' was proposed by China's former chairman Hu Jintao, the present chairman Xi Jinping has been advocating a theme of 'the Chinese dream,' which has become the present official

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<sup>63</sup> Wielander, 46.

slogan of the government.<sup>64</sup> With regard to Christianity, sinicisation has been the policy under Xi's leadership. Nevertheless, political slogans are often employed to address or disguise the opposite reality.

Moving into the 21<sup>st</sup> century, social unrest due to social injustice, wealth polarisation and moral breakdown have become major public concerns in the country.<sup>65</sup> When a Chinese theology should have something to do with the Chinese context, significant social change certainly presents challenges to the formation of Chinese theology. Therefore, as the socio-political context changes significantly, or even shifts its pattern, it is necessary to research how certain Chinese church leaders may have responded to the shifted context. That being said, the present study on selected figures' particular socio-political approaches will be helpful for both understanding the changing context and formulating a Chinese theology in response to its context.

#### 1.4.3 Addressing the Rise of Urban Churches

The research topic takes into account the fast growth of Chinese churches in urban centres. Until the 1990s, Chinese churches, especially house churches, thrived mainly in rural areas. As the gospel spread on Chinese university campuses during

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<sup>64</sup> One of the articles on Xi Jinping's 'the Chinese dream' is Shi Zhongquan, 'Zhongguo Meng Sixiang: Cong Mao Zedong Dao Xi Jinping' [The Chinese Dream: From Mao Zedong to Xi Jinping], *Mao Zedong Deng Xiaoping Lilun Yanjiu* [Studies on Mao Zedong and Deng Xiaoping Theories] 10, (October 2013): 1-8.

<sup>65</sup> Wielander highlights examples from a discourse on the breakdown of morality and traditional Chinese values in the Reform Era. Wielander, 30-34. In a similar vein, Carver T. Yu describes the time from 1980 onward in China as 'Market capitalism was mounted onto a totalitarian socio-political system rife with corruptions.' Carver T. Yu, 'Redeemer and Transformer: The Relevance of Christ for China's Cultural Renewal and Liberation,' in *Diverse and Creative Voices: Theological Essays from the Majority World*, eds. Dieumeme Noelliste and Sung Wook Chung (Cambridge: James Clarke & Co, 2015), 72.

the 1980s and the 1990s, after the Tiananmen Square event in 1989, a significant number of young Chinese intellectuals turned to Christianity. Many Chinese intellectuals who had gone abroad for study or work returned to China as Christians, and numerous migrant workers joined urban churches. As a result of these trends, numerous churches emerged and developed in cities.<sup>66</sup> Urban churches, except perhaps those consisting mainly of rural migrant workers, have certain features that differ from that of rural churches. Urban Christians live a very different lifestyle, have much higher education and better access to social media. It is mainly the urban-educated Christians who are starting to make their theological reflection known to the public. Benefiting from economic development, some of the house churches and Three-Self churches have made their theological ideas, social concern and human rights defence known to the public through social media.<sup>67</sup> The present research on the theological evolution represented by the four church leaders will take into account all these new features of social and ecclesiastical developments. In this sense, the present research is timely and will offer an observation on the latest trends of theological concerns in mainland China.

### 1.5 Methodology

The present study selects four Evangelical church figures as case studies. For the purposes of this study, key representative church figures from the 1980s to the 2010s will be: Lin Xiangao and Wang Weifan, both of whom were church leaders in

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<sup>66</sup> Fulton, 9-11.

<sup>67</sup> Wielander describes Christian rights defence, middle-class grassroots activism and democracy movement activists. Wielander, 138-41, 143-46.

the times before and after the Cultural Revolution, and Sun Yi and Wu Weiqing, both of whom have been church leaders since the mid-1990s and early 2000s. These four figures are chosen mainly because of their prominent roles in either house churches or Three-Self churches: for the former period, Lin was a house church leader and Wang was a Three-Self church leader. For the latter period, Sun has been a house church leader and Wu has been a Three-Self church leader. Lin, a well-known house church pastor based in Guangzhou, was widely considered as a spiritual leader of house churches. Wang, based in Nanjing, served mainly as a theologian and seminary professor, with a short time of experience as a leader in a Three-Self church. Although Wang was not involved in much direct church work, his teaching and writing have widely influenced Three-Self church pastors and leaders.<sup>68</sup> In this sense, his writing broadly represents the thoughts and practices of many Three-Self church pastors. Sun, though a university professor in theology, has been involved in the Beijing Shouwang (house) Church as a church elder for more than a

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<sup>68</sup> Wang worked as a lecturer and academic dean at the NUTS from 1981 to 1999. 1981 was the year when the seminary was reopened after its closure since 1966. Alexander Chow describes Wang Weifan as ‘continues to be well loved by many within the Chinese church for his preaching, theological teaching, devotional writings and poetry.’ Alexander Chow, ‘Wang Weifan’s Cosmic Christ,’ *Modern Theology* 32, no. 3 (July 2016): 386. Also, through his interview with many pastors and leaders of the TSPM and CCC about Wang Weifan, Chow often heard from the interviewee calling Wang as their teacher and expressing endearingly of the impact Wang had on them. Alexander Chow, ‘Wang Weifan: An Evangelical in the TSPM,’ Wordpress, 17 March 2016, <https://alexanderchow.wordpress.com/2016/03/17/wang-weifan-evangelical-in-the-tspm/>.

decade.<sup>69</sup> Wu, a long-time church minister, has been serving as the senior pastor of the Beijing Haidian (Three-Self) Christian Church for many years. These four figures are chosen for case study not primarily because their theologies are intellectually interesting but because they represent the theologies of many Chinese Evangelical churches in reality. In other words, they are representatives of the bigger picture of Chinese Evangelical communities. In view of this, a study of their theologies will help to reveal the theological thinking of Chinese Evangelicals.

The study will adopt primarily an approach of historical theology in the sense that it will explore and discuss selected figures' theologies in their historical contexts. It will mainly be based on a literature study because there is sufficient literature in both printed works and the Internet. As a result, other minor sources only available inside China or interviews will not be necessary. The main primary sources in the study will include the four figures' published writings and unpublished writings such as written sermons and Internet articles. They mainly include Lin Xiangao's series of *Lingyin (Spiritual Voice)*, the corpus of Wang Weifan *Shinian Juju: Wang Weifan Wenji (1997-2007)* and *Ershi Zai Cangmang: Wang Weifan Wenji (1979-1998)*, Sun Yi's books, articles, sermons and written materials of his church, and Wu Weiqing's written sermons, DMin dissertation and written materials

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<sup>69</sup> Sun Yi is one of the main Shouwang church leaders who propose the church's vision of being public and collective witness for Christ, also called 'a city set on a hill.' His involvement can also be seen from his oppression with the church. In 2011, Jin Tianming, the senior pastor of the Shouwang church, together with all the church elders and leaders, including Sun Yi, were put on house arrest. Cf. 'Women Shi Weile Xinyang: Wei Zhengjiao Chongtu Zhi Quanguo Renda de Gongming Qingyuanshu' [We Are Here for Faith: Petition to National People's Congress for State-Religion Conflict], *Xinghua [Almond Flowers]* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 2011): 9. Besides, there was a time that Sun Yi was in danger of losing his teaching position at the university because of his firm involvement in the Shouwang church. Sunyi, 'Jingli Ziji de Si' [Experience of My Own Death], *Xinghua [Almond Flowers]* 17, no. 3 (Autumn 2011): 122.

of his church. Among these primary sources, Lin's *Lingyin* series has both a printed and a digital version, which is available on the Internet. Wang's collection of writings is published in two books. Sun's published books, articles, and other articles are mainly available from Shouwang church's official journals *Xinghua* (*Almond flowers*), *Shouwang Wangluo Qikan* (*Shouwang Online Journal*) and @ *Shouwang*, which are accessible from the Internet. Wu's sermons and written materials are well compiled and available from Haidian church's official website. The study will explore and discuss the distinctive features of each figure's theology and offer some analyses and comparisons among them when it is appropriate. Besides an approach of historical theology, historical research will be included as an additional approach to explore the historical context and the historical evolution of the Chinese Protestants' theologies. As different theologies emerge from different historical contexts, a historical approach will be helpful to explain certain theological concerns in view of their historical situations.

This is a thesis that covers recent history, including two figures who are still alive and living in China, Sun Yi and Wu Weiqing. While speaking with these individuals may have enriched this study in a number of ways, interviews were not conducted because of two main reasons. The first reason, as mentioned earlier, is the sufficiency of their written materials, including printed works and online resources. The second reason concerns ethical issues. Because Sun Yi has undergone harassment and house arrest due to his involvement in Shouwang church, which has gone through serious oppression from the government, interviewing Sun for this study would have ethical issues. While Wu Weiqing works within the TSPM system

and tends to follow a discreet way of conducting ministry, an interview with him for this thesis may inadvertently open him against his wishes and potentially cause trouble for him or his ministry.

For the convenience of non-Chinese readers, Chinese words used in the present thesis will be Romanised using the Chinese *pinyin* system as the primary Romanised system, while the older Wade-Giles system will be followed when it is used in print by other authors. Some Chinese characters will appear in footnotes as original URL addresses. Since many sources quoted in this thesis are written in Chinese, the Chinese will be translated by myself unless otherwise stated.

This introductory chapter has discussed the research topic, scope and limitations of the present thesis, reviewed previous literature and identified primary and subsidiary research questions. It has also discussed the wider significance of the research topic and explained the methodologies of research. The next chapter will start with an exploration of the historical evolution of Chinese Protestants' socio-political engagement from the 1900s to the mid-1960s, which will then provide a historical background for the present study on Chinese Evangelical's socio-political approaches from the 1980s to the 2010s.

## II. THE HISTORICAL EVOLUTION

Though the present thesis focuses on the Chinese Evangelical socio-political approaches in the period from the 1980s to the 2010s, this chapter intends to provide an overall picture of the historical evolution of Protestants' socio-political approaches, namely, how Protestants approached the socio-political context from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-1960s. It will explore Protestants' diverse socio-political concerns and theological attempts in response to the socio-political changes during the first two-thirds of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Considering that the establishment of the PRC in 1949 brought dramatic change to China, this chapter will be divided into two sections, the first exploring Christian responses in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century and the second describing Christian responses under the young PRC.

### 2.1 Christian Responses in the First Half of the Twentieth Century (1900-1949)

In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, China was in the midst of socio-political crises. The crises were due to various historical causes, including Western and Japanese aggression from the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, domestic crises like the Taiping Rebellion (1851-64), the corrupt Qing government and the weak Republican government. In the face of various crises, some Chinese engaged in a quest for a modernised China, which brought about both criticism and a nationalistic spirit to Protestant Christianity. In the process of engaging with the quest and responding to criticism, even attack, from their non-Christian contemporaries, Protestant intellectuals kept a socio-political concern in the shaping of their theology.



Related to the quest for China's modernisation, the issue of paternalism was another concern of Chinese Protestants. When the quest for a modernised China brought about a spirit of nationalism and Christianity was perceived as being closely associated with Western imperialism, Western missionaries' dominant role in mission-church relations seemed contradictory to a spirit of nationalism. Therefore, Chinese Protestants faced the issue of paternalism and became increasingly concerned about independence and indigenisation of the Chinese church. Also related to these socio-political concerns was the theological influence of the American fundamentalist-modernist controversy on Chinese soil, thereby influencing different perspectives on the Christian role in modernity. When missionaries brought the controversy into the mission field in China, various Chinese Protestants responded to it differently. Their different responses brought a split among themselves and directed their approaches towards the socio-political context. The quest for a modernised China, the issue of paternalism and the fundamentalist-modernist controversy were all rising concerns in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. In view of this, an exploration on Chinese Protestants' responses to these issues will help to reveal their approaches of socio-political engagement.

### 2.1.1 Responses to Modernisation

The first concern, the quest for a modernised China, was passively triggered by way of the two Opium Wars (1840-42; 1856-60) when the Qing government was militarily defeated by the British and the French and forced to sign unequal treaties. After these wars, a group of Qing government high-ranking officers, called the

*yangwu pai*, ascribed their defeat to the foreigners' possession of advanced technology, which the Qing military could by no means match.<sup>1</sup> Therefore, the widespread slogan of the time was '*zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong*' (Chinese values as the backbone, Western technology as the management).<sup>2</sup> The *yangwu pai* then launched the Westernisation Movement (*yangwu yundong*), a movement of learning Western technology and establishing the modern Chinese military enterprise. However, the Chinese navy, by then fairly modern in technology and bigger than the Japanese navy by size, was defeated by the Japanese navy in the first Sino-Japanese war (1894-95). This defeat was considered the bankruptcy of the Westernisation Movement.

Disappointed by the failure of the Westernisation Movement, in 1898, a group of reformers, though acknowledging the Qing Monarchy and Confucianism,<sup>3</sup> proposed the Wuxu Reform (*wuxu bianfa*). The proposal was endorsed by the Qing emperor Guangxu, who during his rule (1875-1908), issued a series of policy reforms as an attempt to establish a constitutional monarchy. However, the Reform encountered strong opposition from the powerful feudal Qing authority and was

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<sup>1</sup> Li Hongzhang, 'Pengliao Hangao' [Friend's Letters], in *Li Wenzhong Gong Quanji* 2 [*Complete Works of Li Wenzhong* 2] (Taipei: Wenhai Press, 1980), 46. Quoted in Zhang Chuchu, 'Lun Yangwu Yundong Zhidao Sixiang "Zhongxue Wei Ti, Xixue Wei Yong" de Helixing' [On the Rationality of the Guideline of the Westernisation Movement: Chinese Values as the Backbone, Western Technology as the Management], *Honghe Xueyuan Xuebao* [*Journal of Honghe University*] 10, no. 3 (June 2012): 54.

<sup>2</sup> Zhang Zhidong, *Zhang Wenxiang Gong Quanji Zouyi* 47 [*Complete Works of Zhang Wenxiang* 47] (Beijing: China Bookstore, 1990), 22. Quoted in Zhang Chuchu, 'Lun Yangwu Yundong,' 55.

<sup>3</sup> Kang Youwei, one of the leaders of the reform movement, interpreted Confucius' teaching as the basis for a reform of constitutional monarchy. Kang Youwei, *Kongzi Gaizhi Kao* [*Research on Confucius' Reform*] (Beijing: China Book Company, 1958), 238-284. Cf. Su Xinhua and Zhang Xiaohui, 'Wuxu Bianfa Shiqi Zhishi Fenzi Xintai Qianxi' [On Intellectuals' Mentality During the Wuxu Reform], *Qianyan* [*Forward Position*], no. 24 (Summer 2010): 134.

crushed by Empress Dowager Cixi. Although the Reform failed, it was an attempt to move beyond *yangwu pai*'s idea of technology advancement to political reform.

After this, China experienced crises like the Boxer Uprising (1899-1900), the military invasion by the Eight-Power Allied Forces (1900), and the subsequent signing of the Peace Protocol with the Eight-Power Alliance (1901). When all these caused the deterioration of Qing's rule, the government claimed to prepare for constitutional reform in 1901, but it was not really implemented.

As the attempts of constitutional reform all failed, the Xinhai Revolution (1911) brought an end to the Qing dynasty and resulted in the establishment of the Republic of China in 1912. However, the Revolution was soon betrayed by warlords like Yuan Shikai, who claimed to be the new emperor of China in 1914, and Zhang Xun, who commanded his force into Beijing and claimed to resume the Qing dynasty in 1917. Neither Yuan nor Zhang succeed. But their attempts indicated a strong presence of feudal mentality in China. The Republic then could not take strong root in society as competing feudal warlords who pursued their own interests effectively dividing China.

Around this time, several Chinese intellectuals came to realise that the obstacle of China's modernisation was not inadequate technology or a corrupt political system; rather, it was the spirit of the Chinese people that had gone astray, and it was impossible to run a new political system with an old mentality. To them, a change of culture and mentality should take place prior to a change in the political

system.<sup>4</sup> Inspired by this idea, the New Culture Movement started in 1915 when Chen Duxiu (1879-1942) launched the periodical *Qingnian (Youth)*, through which Chen exhorted his readers to a self-awakening to take up the role of shaping a new Chinese society.<sup>5</sup> His disillusioning experience with Confucian tradition led him to reject Confucianism and look to the modern West for answers. In 1917, Cai Yuanpei (1868-1940) called for the substitution of aesthetic education for religion. He argued that in modern times, humankind was free from the bondage of religion and should be educated through secularised art, which was the best way to express human intellect, will and emotion.<sup>6</sup> In the same year, Hu Shi (1891-1962) advocated the popularisation of vernacular Chinese (*baihua*) to replace the scholastic classical Chinese language in order to improve the education system and spread new ideas among the ordinary people.

While the New Culture Movement began as a cultural discussion, the May Fourth Movement in 1919, which was a nation-wide street demonstration by students and workers against the Treaty of Versailles,<sup>7</sup> marked the beginning of a push

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<sup>4</sup> Xie Fang, 'Zhidu Chuangxin Yu Zhongguo Xiandaihua: Cong Wuxu Bianfa, Qingmo Xinzheng Dao Xinhai Geming' [System Renovation and China's Modernisation: From Wuxu Reform, Late Qing's Reform to the Xinhai Revolution], *Zhonghua Wenhua Luntan* [Forum of Chinese Culture], no. 1 (2002): 58.

<sup>5</sup> Chen Duxiu, 'Jinggao Qingnian' [My Solemn Plea to Youth], *Qingnian* [Youth] 1, no.1 (September 1915): 13-14. Starting from the second volume, the periodical's name was changed to *Xin Qingnian* [New Youth].

<sup>6</sup> Cai Yuanpei, 'Yi Meiyu Dai Zongjiao Shuo' [On the Substitution of Aesthetic Education for Religion], *Xue Yi* [Study of Arts] 1, no. 2 (1917): 264.

<sup>7</sup> In this Treaty, Foreign powers agreed and arranged to transfer much of the land of Shandong from German to Japanese control instead of giving it back to China.

towards a socio-political debate.<sup>8</sup> It gave rise to a spirit of nationalism and an urgent quest for national salvation. Generally speaking, nationalism is a broad concept, referring to the loyalty towards the interest of one's own nation in a given historical context. In the Chinese context in the 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries, it mainly refers to a concern for the survival, independence and development of China in the face of foreign aggressions.<sup>9</sup> To many May Fourth intellectuals, mainly those returning from overseas, modern Western ideology was the path leading towards China's national salvation and modernisation. Thus, they expressed the idea of total rejection of the traditional, basically Confucianism and feudal system, and complete acceptance of modern Western ideology, which was for them science and democracy.

From the Westernisation Movement to the May Fourth Movement, the Chinese people made various attempts toward modernisation. Their attempts influenced material, political, cultural and ideological aspects of society because it involved learning from Western technology, constitutional monarchy, republicanism, Western culture, science and democracy. In the quest for modernisation, the Chinese people learned from both their own history and from the West, and both their understanding and the country did in fact move toward modernisation.

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<sup>8</sup> The May Fourth event itself triggered a movement, which was consistent yet moved beyond the New Culture Movement. Therefore, in this thesis, all the intellectual and socio-political movements and activities from the May Fourth event to 1922 are discussed as in the May Fourth Movement.

<sup>9</sup> For a discussion on Chinese nationalism in the context of the May Fourth Enlightenment after 1919, see Vera Schwarcz, *The Chinese Enlightenment: Intellectuals and the Legacy of The May Fourth Movement of 1919* (Berkeley; London: University of California Press, 1986), 1-11.

When modernisation became China's national interest, people of tradition also wanted to keep pace. The rise of what would later be called New Confucianism (*xin rujia*) was an attempt of refreshing and reforming the Confucian tradition in the midst of modernisation. Confucianism was under direct attack in the New Culture Movement and accused as being the basis of the feudal monarchy system and an obstacle to China's national progress. In the face of direct attack, some Confucian scholars tried to reform Confucian teaching and make it fit into China's process of modernisation. Liang Shuming (1893-1988), the first modern New Confucian scholar, explained that there was an element of democracy in the Confucian tradition,<sup>10</sup> and this element was not inferior to Western democracy.<sup>11</sup> He then proposed to transform the Western concept of science and democracy based upon Confucian values. Similarly, Xiong Shili (1885-1968) interpreted ancient Chinese tradition as having the concept of respecting common people's freedom and restricting the power of the ruling class.<sup>12</sup> Feng Youlan (1895-1990), although welcoming Western politics, insisted on the advantage of Confucian ethics over against Western politics, namely, the rule of Confucian ethics as being superior over

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<sup>10</sup> Liang Shuming, 'Minzhu shi Shime – Shime shi Minzhu?' [What Is Democracy?], in *Liang Shuming Quanjì* 6 [*Complete Works of Liang Shuming* 6] (Jinan: Shandong Renmin Press, 1993), 125-26.

<sup>11</sup> Liang Shuming, 'Zhongguo Minzhu Yundong de Zhangai Jiu Zai Hechu?' [What is the Obstacle of Chinese Democratic Movement?], in *Liang Shuming Quanjì* 6 [*Complete Works of Liang Shuming* 6] (Jinan: Shandong Renmin Press, 1993), 128.

<sup>12</sup> Xiong Shili, 'Han Feizi Pinglun' [Review on Han Feizi], in *Xiong Shili Quanjì* 5 [*Complete Works of Xiong Shili* 5] (Wuhan: Hubei Education Press, 2001), 296.

the rule of law in the West.<sup>13</sup> In attempting to adjust to modern Western ideas, these New Confucian scholars asserted the superiority of Confucian values. ‘Inward sagehood, outward kingship’<sup>14</sup> continued to be the central teaching of New Confucianism in a way that ‘outward kingship’ was invested with a new connotation that accommodated modern ideas. For instance, Feng Youlan insisted that those who achieve inward sagehood should serve as ‘king,’ which refers to the highest leader in modern society.<sup>15</sup> In general, New Confucian scholars tried to reform the origins of Confucianism by refreshing the idea of ‘inward sagehood’ in modern times and being open to science and democracy as the new content of ‘outward kingship.’<sup>16</sup> They insisted on what they believed to be the good part of Confucianism (i.e., inward sagehood) and proposed to transform Western ideas by way of a Confucian basis.

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<sup>13</sup> Feng proposed four levels of human life: natural level (not knowing the meaning of life), pragmatic level (pursuit of personal benefit), ethical level (pursuit of righteousness) and heaven-earth level (knowing, serving and enjoying heaven), with the last as the highest level. Feng Youlan, *San Song Tang Quanji* 4 [*Complete Works of San Song Tang* 4] (Zhengzhou: Henan Renmin Press, 2001), 498-500, 514. Quoted in Cheng Zhihua, ‘Jishi er Chushi zhi Chaoshi-Feng Youlan de Shengren Guan’ [This-worldly, Other-worldly, Transcendent This-worldly: Feng Youlan’s View on Sagehood], *Xinan Minzu Daxue Xuebao* [*Acedemic Journal of Southwest University for Nationalities*], no. 2 (2012): 56.

<sup>14</sup> ‘Inward sagehood, outward kingship’ (*nei sheng wai wang*) first appeared in the Daoist writing *Zhuangzi-Tianxia Pian* (*Zhuangzi-Under Heaven*). It was later advocated and developed as a central Confucian value. Inward sagehood means having inner nobility of a sage through cultivating one’s self disposition, while outward kingship means the outward expression and application of the inner nobility in the social field. Cf. Tian Qinyun and Luo Jiaxiang, “‘Nei Sheng Wai Wang’ Yu Zhonghua Minzu Jingshen de Goujian” [‘Being An Inner Sage So As to Rule the Outer World’ and the Construction of the Spirit of the Chinese Nation], *Huazhong Keji Daxue Xuebao* [*Journal of Huazhong University of Science and Technology*] 20, no. 5 (2006): 12.

<sup>15</sup> Feng, *San Song Tang Quanji* 5, 137. Quoted in Cheng, ‘Jishi er Chushi,’ 58.

<sup>16</sup> Tang Junyi, Mou Zongsan, Xu Fuguan, and Zhang Junli, ‘Wei Zhongguo Wenhua Jinggao Shijie Renshi Xuanyan’ [Declaration on Chinese Culture to the People in the World], *Minzu Pinglun* [*Review on Democracy*], no.1, 1958. Quoted in Li Xianghai, ‘Wusi Xinwenhua Yundong Yu Minzu Wenhua Chuantong Guanxi Wenti Zai Tantaoyi 20 Shiji Rujia Sixiang de Xin Kaizhan Weili’ [Re-examining the Relationship Between the May 4th New Culture Movement and National Cultural Tradition-A Case Study of the New Development of Confucian Theory in the Twentieth Century], *Jiaoxue Yu Yanjiu* [*Education and Research*], no.10 (2003): 33.

Besides the New Confucians, some Chinese Buddhists introduced Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*) in order to cope with China's move toward modernisation. In 1913, a Chinese Buddhist monk Taixu (1890-1947) proposed a reform of Buddhist doctrine, suggesting that the attention of Buddhism should be life in this world rather than issues after death. In other words, Buddhism should adapt to the current ethos and contribute to human progress.<sup>17</sup> Another Buddhist monk Yinshun (1906-2005), Taixu's student, continued his teacher's work by proclaiming that Humanistic Buddhism should be humanistic rather than being concerned about ghosts or deities.<sup>18</sup> In 1933, *Haichao Yin* (*Sound of Sea Tide*), a Buddhist journal, published a special issue on Humanistic Buddhism, claiming that Sakyamuni Buddha's teaching was human-centred: Sakyamuni Buddha lived an earthly life and revealed the way of life in this world rather than meditating on any mysterious matter. It argued that the later development of Buddhism was a distortion of the original Humanistic Buddhism into a mysterious other-worldly one.<sup>19</sup> In 1925, the establishment of the Buddhist College of Minnan in Xiamen brought significant influence through its many well-known graduates who went on to develop Humanistic Buddhism in China and some Southeast Asian countries. Through all

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<sup>17</sup> Taixu, *Taixu Quanshu* [*Complete Works of Taixu*] (Taiwan: Shandao Temple, 1998), 29, 77. Quoted in He Jianming, 'Renjian Fojiao de Bainian Huigu yu Fansi' [Humanistic Buddhism: Retrospect and Reflection in A Century], *Shijie Zongjiao Yanjiu* [*Studies in World Religions*], no. 4 (2006): 15.

<sup>18</sup> Yinshun, *Hua Yu Ji* 5 [*Huayu Ji* 5] (Taiwan: Zhengwen Press, 1993), 99-101. Quoted in He, 'Renjian Fojiao de Bainian,' 16.

<sup>19</sup> Editor, 'Renjian Fojiao Tehao Zhengwenqi' [Special Call for Articles on Humanistic Buddhism], *Haichao Yin* [*Sound of Sea Tide*] 14, no. 7 (June 1933): 1.



these efforts, Humanistic Buddhism became socially engaged and adapted to China's process of modernisation.

The emergence and development of New Confucianism and Humanistic Buddhism are indicative of the forceful trend of China's quest for modernisation. Modernisation became the major concern of the country and it in many ways influenced different groups of people's lives and way of thinking. It played a significant role in the overall socio-political context of China.

In the long quest for a modernised China, some Chinese Christians, mostly liberal intellectuals, were as nationalistic as their contemporaries in China. However, they were misunderstood because of their tie with a Western religion – Christianity. Entering into the 1920s, Chinese Christians underwent severe criticism and attack as the New Culture intellectuals, and later the students, workers and the Communists all had their respective agendas against Christianity. The New Culture intellectuals critiqued religion in general and Christianity in particular from the perspective of their scientific epistemological method. Wang Xinggong, a professor of science at the National University of Beijing, proposed that religion must be totally rejected: (1) on epistemological grounds, since religious people view the unknown as known; (2) on cosmological grounds, because religion upholds a prescientific world, which has no scientific explanation; (3) on utilitarian grounds, since religion defies experimentation.<sup>20</sup> Besides the scientific epistemological method, religion was also

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<sup>20</sup> Wang Hsing-kung, 'Zongjiao Wenti Yanjiang Ji I' [Problem of Religion: Lecture I], *Shaonian Zhongguo* [Youth China] 2, no. 8 (February 1921); reprinted in Chang, *Shaonian Zhongguo* [Youth China] (1927), 59-86. Quoted in Chao, *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement*, 106.

rejected on the basis of the theory of social evolution. Li Huang argued that religion was no longer needed because humankind had evolved from a primitive and religious being to an advanced and nonreligious being. Religion thus became an obstacle to human social progress.<sup>21</sup> During this time, although New Culture intellectuals like Chen Duxiu were appreciative of Christianity for its ethical value in the person of Jesus, the majority of the intellectuals held a negative view toward Christianity.<sup>22</sup> Although the New Culture scholars attacked and even rejected religion, the definition of religion was also evolving at this time. The emergence of Humanistic Buddhism was an example of this evolution, and the discourse around Confucianism was also shaped by a relevant concern for modernisation. As will be seen in later discussions, in Christian intellectuals' response to the Chinese context, their inclusion of a scientific worldview and social involvement also indicated an evolving view on religion.

Christianity was discussed by New Culture intellectuals from a purely intellectual perspective, and later criticism after the May Fourth event was basically cultural and semi-political. However, when revolution and anti-imperialism became the themes of the nation, anti-Christian movements burst out and lingered in the

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<sup>21</sup> Li Huang, 'Shehui Zhuyi Yu Zongjiao' [Socialism and Religion], *Shaonian Zhongguo* [Youth China] 3, no. 1 (February 1921): 48.

<sup>22</sup> Chen explains that 'we should nurture in our blood Jesus' noble and great personality as well as ardent and profound emotions, which will save us from the abyss of coldness, darkness and dirtiness.' Yet, with regard to Christianity, Chen comments that Jesus' great personality and profound emotion are the fundamental doctrine of Christianity, and 'apart from Jesus' personality and emotion, we know nothing of Christian doctrine.' Chen Duxiu, 'Jidujiao yu Zhongguoren' [Christianity and the Chinese], *Xing Qingnian* [New Youth] 7, no. 3 (1920): 17, 21. Chen's appreciation towards Jesus' personality and emotions should be understood in light of his idea of the Chinese people's need of 'ethical awakening,' which was to Chen the 'final awakening' after his disappointment towards the failures of previous attempts at national salvation (*jiu guo*). Schwarcz, 37.

1920s, during which Christianity was accused and attacked as being a tool of Western imperialism. In March 1922, Youth Progress (*Qingnian Jinbu*), a group of students in Shanghai, announced the formation of the Anti-Christian Student Federation (*Fei Jidujiao Xuesheng Tongmeng*) to oppose the conference of the World Student Christian Federation (WSCF), which was to be held at Tsinghua University (Beijing) in April. Meanwhile, the formation of the Great Federation of Anti-Religionists (*Fei Zongjiao Da Tongmeng*) was announced in Beijing. They all accused the WSCF as being an agent of Western imperialism and Tsinghua University for allowing its campus to be used for a religious conference. The campaign soon developed into a nationwide anti-Christian movement.<sup>23</sup> In 1924, students, intellectuals, workers and the Communists launched the Restoration of Educational Rights Movement and singled out Christian colleges and the YMCA for direct attack. They demanded the government to require all foreign schools to be registered and their principals to be Chinese nationals. On the 30<sup>th</sup> of May 1925, the killing of striking workers by British officers led to nationwide strikes and boycotts against British trade in south China. Although it was initially against British power, a great number of demonstrations and attacks directly affected missionary institutions. During the Northern Expedition (1926-28), which led to a at least seemingly unified China ruled by the Nationalist Party, the Chinese troops vandalised mission property and oppressed missionaries and Chinese church workers. In March 1927, six

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<sup>23</sup> Yamamoto describes the formation of the Anti-Christian Student Federation (*Fei Jidujiao Xuesheng Tongmeng*) and the Great Federation of Anti-Religionists (*Fei Zongjiao Da Tongmeng*) as the beginning of the anti-Christian movement of the 1920s. Yamamoto, 113-14.

missionaries were killed in Nanjing by Chinese soldiers who were out of control and stimulated by the Communists. As a result, around five thousand missionaries left China. Thus, from 1924 to 1927, the anti-Christian attack changed from a cultural, semi-political movement (as it had been in the 1922 Anti-Christian Student Federation) to a well-organised and party-directed mass political movement.<sup>24</sup>

When Christianity was criticised by Chinese intellectuals and students from the May Fourth Movement, Chinese Protestant intellectuals responded with interest and presented Christianity as one among many alternatives of ‘national salvation’ (*jiu guo*). Jonathan Chao categorises and examines three types of Christian responses. The first type, represented by Xu Baoqian, was a critical examination of institutional Christianity as it existed in China. Xu on the one hand expressed critical comments on the internal problems of Protestants in China.<sup>25</sup> On the other hand, he criticised the introverted character of the church in its relation to Chinese society, urging the church to have a ‘social platform’ and a ‘declaration of what part Christianity can play in China’s attempt to solve her numerous problems.’<sup>26</sup> Meanwhile, Xu explained that the advantage of Christianity was its dynamic moral power, which the May Fourth Movement lacked.<sup>27</sup> The second type, represented by Zhao Zichen, was an ideological adaptation of Christianity to the new culture. Zhao

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<sup>24</sup> Chao, *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement*, 180.

<sup>25</sup> Xu criticised missionaries as ‘autocratic, self-conceited, comfort-loving, lazy, careless, and practicing bad habits such as smoking.’ He also pointed out the inadequacy of Chinese preachers’ training, preaching and knowledge of contemporary life, and ordinary church members’ lack of spiritual vitality. Xu Baoqian, ‘Jidujiao Xin Sichao’ [New Ethos in Christianity], *Shengming Jikan* [*Life Quarterly*], no. 1 (1920): 3-4.

<sup>26</sup> *Ibid.*, 6.

<sup>27</sup> Xu Baoqian, ‘Dangjin Jiaohui Wenti zhi Shangque yu Jianyi: Zhongguo Jidujiao Qiantu de Zhanwang’ [Discussion and Suggestion on Current Church Issues: Prospects for Christianity in China], *Shengming Yu Zhenli* [*Life and Truth*] 12, no. 5-6 (1939): 260.

realised that for Christianity to be relevant to modern China, it would have to become an integral part of Chinese culture and a necessary part of Chinese life.<sup>28</sup> He believed that Christianity had much to contribute to the national reconstruction since personal regeneration has a close correlation with social reconstruction. As only Christianity could produce a new man who could serve the new society, Christianity must lead the way in China's social reconstruction.<sup>29</sup> The third type, represented by Cheng Jingyi, was a Chinese perspective on the relationship of Christianity to Chinese culture. While advocating the indigenisation of the Chinese church, Cheng insisted on the affirmation of Chinese cultural identity. He believed that Christ came to fulfil rather than to destroy Chinese culture.<sup>30</sup> He expressed an identification with the Chinese people by endorsing the May Fourth Movement and urging Chinese pastors and Christians to take a leading role in patriotic activities.<sup>31</sup> In their responses to the May Fourth Movement, these Protestant intellectuals were optimistic about the saving role that Christianity could play for China. Through *Shengming Jikan* (*Life Quarterly*),<sup>32</sup> some of them published their personal testimonies, addressed the issues and charges made by those who opposed Christianity, encouraged open discussion

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<sup>28</sup> Zhao Zichen, 'Xinjing Duiyu Jidujiao de Qixiang' [the New Context's Guidance for Christianity], *Shengming Jikan* [*Life Quarterly*], no. 4 (November 1920): 13.

<sup>29</sup> T.C. Chao, 'Can Christianity be the Basis of Social Reconstruction?' *The Chinese Recorder* (1912-1938), (1 May 1922): 315.

<sup>30</sup> Cheng Jingyi, 'Mingri de Zhongguo Jiaohui' [Tomorrow's Chinese Church], *Xinghua Jikan* [*Xinghua Quarterly*], no. 1 (Summer and Autumn 1928): 33.

<sup>31</sup> Cheng Jingyi, 'The Chinese Christian Church and National Movements,' *The Chinese Recorder* (1912-1938), (1 July 1919): 456-57.

<sup>32</sup> *Shengming Jikan* (*Life Quarterly*) was the journal of the *Shengming She* (Life Fellowship), which consisted of a group of prominent Chinese Protestant intellectuals at Yanjing University, including Xu Baoqian, Zhao Zichen, Liu Tingfang, Cheng Jingyi, who wrote in response to the May Fourth Movement.

on contemporary issues, presented their view toward the New Culture Movement,<sup>33</sup> and explained the constructive elements that Christianity could offer China.<sup>34</sup> In various ways, they engaged in presenting Christianity to non-Christian intellectuals.

However, when the situation became hostile from 1922 to 1927, the Protestant intellectuals felt the need to adapt Christianity to the new context. Some of the intellectuals in Beijing, basically liberals, organised public lectures on Christian response, and through their lectures and discussions, they rejected all the supernatural elements in the Bible and in the Christian creeds. Liu Tingfang advocated an experimental approach to faith: one's present faith would serve as a hypothesis, subject to change according to one's experiential results.<sup>35</sup> In demonstrating that Christianity was consistent with progress, Zhao Zichen stated that faith ought to change in accordance with social change, and that modern Christianity should be reasonable, scientific and relevant to contemporary humanistic thinking.<sup>36</sup> Wu Yaozong, a YMCA secretary in Beijing at the time, said, 'The God we believed in yesterday might not be the same God we believe in today. The Jesus we know today may not necessarily be the same we shall know tomorrow.'<sup>37</sup> To these

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<sup>33</sup> For example, Xu Baoqian points out several flaws of the New Culture Movement: (1) limitation to one person or school of thought; (2) irresponsible criticism toward others; (3) adaptation without ethical standard; and (4) seeking the thoroughness of thought but not action. Xu Baoqian, 'Xin Sichao yu Jidujiao' [The New Ethos and Christianity], *Shengming Jikan* [*Life Quarterly*], no. 2 (1 September 1920): 2.

<sup>34</sup> Xu Baoqian gives Christianity's corrective for his contemporaries: (1) a spirit of progress; (2) constructive sympathy; (3) an ethical standard; and (4) thoroughness in action. *Ibid.*, 3.

<sup>35</sup> Liu Tingfang, 'Zhongguo de Jidu Jiaohui,' [The Christian Church of China], *Shengming Jikan* [*Life Quarterly*] 2, no. 9-10 (June 1922), 4.

<sup>36</sup> Zhao Zichen, 'Women Yao Shime Yang de Zongjiao?' [What Kind of Religion Do We Want?], *Shengming Jikan* [*Life Quarterly*] 3, no. 9 (May 1923), 1-2.

<sup>37</sup> Wu Yaozong, 'Wo Geren de Zongjiao Jingyan,' [My Personal Religious Experience], *Shengming Jikan* [*Life Quarterly*] 3, no. 7-8 (April 1923): 4.

Protestant intellectuals, making Christianity relevant was their primary concern. In their discussion, the content of Christian faith was adjusted according to the demands of modern Chinese society.

Likewise, in response to the charge of being associated with the exploiting capitalist class, they explained that Christianity was a religion of the working class and of the ordinary people. They also tried to show how Chinese Christians were identified with the Chinese people, Chinese society, and China as a whole. Liu Tingfang redefined the church as a ‘public servant’ of the Chinese people, suggesting that the church could serve the Chinese people by preserving their Chinese cultural heritage and being a prophet to them, leading them forward in this changing world.<sup>38</sup> In these efforts, they tried to keep in line with China’s national interest. Regarding the accusation of being associated with imperialism, Xu Baoqian urged Chinese Christians to participate in the movement opposing the unequal treaties and the movement of the Restoration of Educational Rights. He considered such participation a way of showing Chinese Christians’ patriotism, promoting indigenised Chinese churches, and informing the public that there is no relationship between Christianity and imperialism.<sup>39</sup> The National Christian Council (NCC) also issued a declaration, calling for the abrogation of unequal treaties and urging Chinese Christians to renounce the privileges guaranteed in those unequal treaties. After the May 30<sup>th</sup> incident in 1925, Chinese Christians held meetings in several major cities

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<sup>38</sup> Liu, ‘Zhongguo de Jidu Jiaohui,’ 5.

<sup>39</sup> Xu Baoqian, ‘Fan Jidujiao Yundong Yu Wuren Jinhou Ying Cai Zhi Fangzhen’ [The Anti-Christian Movement and What Measures We Should Take], *Shengming Jikan* [*Life Quarterly*] 6, no. 5 (1926): 5-6.

to protest against British injustice. When the Chinese soldiers of the Northern Expedition conducted anti-Christian activities and condemned Christianity as a tool of imperialism in Wuhan in the autumn of 1926, the local Christians organised a ‘Wuhan Christian Union’ and issued a declaration in support of the revolution.<sup>40</sup>

In the quest for China’s modernisation, Protestant Christians underwent misunderstanding, criticism and attack by their Chinese contemporaries. In the process, it was mainly the Protestant intellectuals rather than church ministers who actively engaged in responding to the quest and the hostile socio-political context. Some of the Protestant intellectuals were able to adjust the content of the Christian faith in their response. Collectively, they demonstrated their desire and effort to contribute to the socio-political progress in China.

### 2.1.2 Responses to Paternalism

The second concern was the issue of paternalism, which has had a long enduring issue for both the nation and for Christianity in China. Paternalism, coming from a notion of being ‘fatherly,’ describes a relationship between two parties, whereby one ‘younger’ party is subordinated, restricted, and made dependent upon an ‘older’ and more ‘mature’ party. In terms of the nation-state, it has tended to refer to a view that foreign colonial powers dominate or subordinate China and internal Chinese affairs. The famous slogan of Qing’s government officer Wei Yuan ‘*shi yi changji yi zhi yi*’ (learning from the foreigners’ technology in order to handle the

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<sup>40</sup> Huang Qiting, ‘Wuhan Jidutu Gexin Yundong Qiyin Yu Houguo’ [The Causes and Results of Christian Reform Movement in Wuhan], *CHNC*, no. 10 (1928): 25. Quoted in Chao, *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement*, 206.



foreigners) definitely indicated the idea of learning from foreigners. Although the Chinese underwent humiliation and hated foreign invasion, they realised that success with regards to dealing with foreign powers depended upon their ability to learn from the foreigners, at least in terms of learning from their science, technology and military industries. In the Wuxu Reform of 1898, what the reformers proposed was a model of constitutional monarchy developed in Japan and Britain. In the Revolution of 1911, the nationalists intended to establish in China a political system of Western democracy. Thus, the reformers and the revolutionaries advocated no new governmental system but only learned models from Japan and the West. When the New Culture Movement rose in the 1910s, the proposed solution to China's illness in culture and tradition was science and democracy, which were well developed in the West. Being stirred by nationalism and looking for survival and modernisation for the nation, *the yangwupai*, the Wuxu reformers, the revolutionaries in 1911 and the New Culture intellectuals looked for answers from either Western modernisation or the Japanese Meiji Reform (1860s). However, it was not a friendly learning process. As the Westerners and the Japanese had long been oppressing China through military invasion, commercial trade and unequal treaties, the Chinese did not want the oppressors to have control over them.

Paternalism also became an issue of modern missions when Western missions were closely associated with colonial powers. David Bosch describes that when colonial powers wanted to utilise missionaries for their own interest, mostly political and commercial, missionaries tended to support the colonisers and consider

colonialism a means of promoting missions as well as Western civilisation.<sup>41</sup> A paternalistic mentality thus rose among the colonisers and missionaries. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, ‘colonial officials and missionaries alike gladly but consciously took it upon themselves to be the guardians of the less-developed races.’<sup>42</sup> While paternalism was a common issue in the mission fields, it also became a concern among the churches in China. In the context of the church-mission relationships in China, paternalism tends to refer to an attitude or practice of foreign missionaries, consciously or unconsciously, subordinating Chinese Christians. From the beginning of modern Protestant missions to China, foreign missionaries had played a dominant role in missions and in the churches. Because Christians lacked experience and resources, they became dependent on foreign missionaries for decades, but the principle of self-supporting, self-governing and self-propagating churches was also well-known among Protestant missionaries in China. In fact, early in 1877, at the first General Conference of Protestant Missionaries of China, the Reverend John Bulter of the American Presbyterian Mission in Ningbo urged his fellow missionaries to adopt the three-self principle.<sup>43</sup> Thus, the idea of making indigenous Chinese churches emerged as early as when missionaries became aware of the three-self formula, which was first articulated by Henry Venn and Rufus Anderson in the

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<sup>41</sup> David J. Bosch, *Transforming Mission: Paradigm Shifts in Theology of Mission* (New York: Orbis Books, 1991), 302-07.

<sup>42</sup> *Ibid.*, 308.

<sup>43</sup> Bulter says, ‘a native church, self-governed, self-supporting, and with her own native pastors, is the best proof we can have that Christianity has taken root in China; and that it is able to maintain its own existence and propagate itself without aid from abroad.’ John Bulter, ‘The Native Pastorate,’ in *Records of the General Conference of Protestant Missionaries of China Held in Shanghai, May 10-24, 1877*, eds. M. T. Yates, R. Nelson, and E. R. Barrett (Shanghai: Presbyterian Mission Press, 1878), 304.

late 19<sup>th</sup> century. As to Chinese Christians, an indigenous church debate occurred among Chinese Christian intellectuals in the 1920s. Christian intellectuals like Cheng Jingyi, T. C. Chao and Liu Tingfang explained several ideas such as Christian beliefs being expressed through Chinese ethnic traits, the integration of Christianity and Chinese culture, and organisational autonomy of the Chinese church.<sup>44</sup> Among these ideas, the concept of an indigenous Chinese church really revolves around the three-self formula. With regard to the three-self formula, self-governance meant that church administration and management was to be carried out by Chinese members. Self-support meant that the Chinese church was to be independent economically. Self-propagation meant that the Chinese church should have its own way of expression in terms of beliefs and missions.<sup>45</sup> Hence, making the Chinese church indigenous was an important goal of Chinese Christians in the late 19<sup>th</sup> century and early 20<sup>th</sup> century as they sought to obtain church independence from foreign missions and give the Chinese church a Chinese identity.<sup>46</sup>

However, Jonathan Chao comments that, on the side of the missionaries, the three-self model was not really indigenous but essentially a transference of the Western local church model to the Chinese field.<sup>47</sup> Although many Chinese Christians were employed by missionaries as preachers or evangelists, only a small

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<sup>44</sup> Yamamoto, 323-68.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid., 349-50.

<sup>46</sup> Today, 'indigenous' is a term used in world Christianity with a different sense—namely, peoples and cultures in a land before colonisers arrived.

<sup>47</sup> Besides, Chao comments that the model did not encourage the development of Chinese theological independence, liturgical renewal, organisational reform, or the integration of Christian faith with Chinese culture. Chao, *The Chinese Indigenous Church Movement*, 42-43.

percentage of them became ordained pastors.<sup>48</sup> Most of the Chinese Christian workers were dependent upon missionaries' financial arrangements. The employment system also fostered Chinese workers' dependence through missionary control over the appointments, transfers, and dismissal of Chinese evangelists. No Chinese workers participated in decision making in these areas. The missionary school plan for Chinese workers made the future Chinese evangelists dependent on foreign missions. As they were trained with a predominantly Western education and lived in a closed subculture, they were, in effect, being alienated from their own culture.<sup>49</sup> As a result, the missionaries did not succeed in creating indigenous Chinese churches. On the contrary, in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries, because missionaries' own efforts shaped the Chinese church in accordance with their own cultural image, many of the Chinese Protestant churches remained dependent on foreign missions.<sup>50</sup> With such dependence, paternalism became an enduring concern among some Chinese Christians, who desired and attempted to move towards the goal of independent and indigenous Chinese churches.

Although the Protestant churches in China had been dependent on foreign missions from the early 19<sup>th</sup> century, the early 20<sup>th</sup> century witnessed the Chinese Christians' quest for church independence. In southern Fujian, prior to the Revolution of 1911, a Presbyterian church synod developed into an independent and

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<sup>48</sup> During 1877 to 1923, unordained Chinese evangelists made up 90.15 percent of Chinese Christian workers in China, while only 9.85 percent were ordained pastors. Ibid., 48-50.

<sup>49</sup> Ibid., 62.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid., 54.

self-supporting Chinese church while maintaining friendly cooperation with foreign missions like the London Missionary Society (1844), the Reformed Church of American Mission (1842) and the English Presbyterian Mission (1852). As it continued growing, in 1917, the number of members and pastors within the church doubled from that of the 1897 figures. Nevertheless, their self-support was limited to the pastors' salary. The church's administration, education and evangelistic work were still reliant on foreign mission funds. In eastern China, around 1902, a group of influential Chinese Christians started an organisation called Christian Union (*Jidutu Hui*) in Shanghai for the purpose of encouraging more self-support and autonomy within the Chinese church. In 1906, pastor Yu Guozhen led this group of Christians to form the Independent Church of Shanghai. In 1911, it developed into a federation called the Chinese Independent Church of Jesus (*Zhongguo Yesu Jiao Zili Hui*), which firmly adopted an approach of complete separation from foreign missions. In northern China, some Chinese Christian leaders in Tengxian, Shandong province, set up a nondenominational Chinese Christian church in 1910. Inspired by this example, Cheng Jingyi, the ordained pastor of the London Mission's East City Church in Beijing, transformed the church into an independent Chinese church. In 1912, Cheng helped to establish the Chinese Christian Church of Beijing (*Beijing Zhonghua Jidu Jiaohui*), encouraging its members to retain membership in their original mission churches while joining the union of the Chinese Christian Church. The examples of the Tengxian church and the Chinese Christian Church of Beijing soon inspired the organisation of a number of Chinese Christian churches in vast areas of Shandong

province. During this time, they all stressed independence and union yet maintained friendly relationships with foreign missionary organisations.<sup>51</sup>

The aforementioned Chinese independent church movements all started in the early 1900s. However, they did not grow much until the Qing dynasty was overthrown in 1911 and the Nationalists introduced the Western concept of freedom of religion and separation of church and state. Under the Qing legal system, Chinese Christians were called *jiaomin* (people of religion), not *pingmin* (common people), and they did not have the legal right to build and own churches, but they were largely protected by extraterritoriality through unequal treaties. Under the Republic after 1912, Christians were simply *guomin* (citizen) like everyone else and were thus free to register churches and religious properties under their own names. Their religious activities were protected under the Provisional Constitution of the Republic. Being granted religious rights and inspired by a spirit of nationalism, some Chinese Christians were able to push the independent church movements forward.

Based on observation of the independent church movements from the early 1900s through the 1910s, Jonathan Chao suggests that three ideas were developed: (1) a Chinese identity for the Chinese church, (2) the concept of independence from foreign finance and administration, and (3) the concept of separation from foreign missions thus creating autonomous Chinese churches. However, as the primary concerns of the movements were to break away from Western missions and establish independent churches, the independent thought in this period did not touch areas like

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 66-68, 72-76, 80-86.

the integration of Christianity and Chinese culture and the relationship between Christianity and the Chinese society.<sup>52</sup> Meanwhile, fearing loss of control, missionaries were critical and opposed the movements.<sup>53</sup> In addition, under the favourable atmosphere during the early Republican period, Chinese Christians felt no pressure or urgency to become more indigenous.<sup>54</sup> They could not expect to see that anti-Christian movements would come as storms in the following decade and put Christianity on the defence.

When the anti-Christian movements broke out in the 1920s, the charges posed by the anti-Christians and the anti-imperialists urged the Chinese Christians to pursue further indigeneity and unity of the Chinese churches, though not without great pressure. Cheng Jingyi and his Chinese colleagues in the China Continuation Committee, an organisation established after the World Missionary Conference in Edinburgh in 1910, witnessed major events of indigenisation and uniting movement among the Chinese churches. The first event was the occurrence of the National Christian Conference of 1922, in which Cheng was elected as the chairman and the Chinese delegates outnumbered the foreign ones. Moreover, the central theme of the conference was ‘the Chinese church,’ and all the preparatory papers and reports stressed how much denominationalism was disliked and how much there existed a great desire for unity in the church. The conference decided to create the National

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<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 90.

<sup>53</sup> For example, in 1915, Rev. Arthur H. Smith stated that the existing Chinese independent churches would not be permanent because of difficulties including lack of able Christian leaders, the tendency toward segregation, the insuperable tasks of enforcing church discipline, and the absence of safeguards against heresy. Arthur H. Smith, ‘The Church in Changing China’ *IRM*, IV (1915): 103. Quoted in Ibid., 91.

<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 93.

Christian Council (NCC) as a representative and advisory body. The NCC did not function as a church council or exercise authority over church doctrine, principle or administration, but it was then entrusted with certain executive power by the bodies it represented and was able to direct co-operative activities on a national scale.<sup>55</sup> In 1927, the establishment of the Church of Christ in China (CCC, *Zhonghua Jidu Jiaohui*) in Shanghai marked another significant achievement of the indigenous church movement. Although a large percentage of conservative missions and churches refused to join the CCC, at the time of its formation, the CCC cooperated with fourteen denominations and missions, including one third of the whole body of Protestant communicants in China.<sup>56</sup> The CCC was therefore the biggest Chinese church union of its time.<sup>57</sup> The NCC and the CCC were then two significant achievements of the indigenous and unity movements of the Chinese Protestants in the 1920s.

In the 1930s, there emerged some completely independent church movements without any foreign leadership, although the founders of these movements were influenced by missionaries or foreign Christians at their early stage. John Sung, an independent evangelist, travelled around the country and drew huge crowds for gospel revivals. Wang Mingdao, a fundamentalist pastor, built up his independent 'Christian Tabernacle' for services in Beijing, and in addition carried out preaching

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<sup>55</sup> Frank Joseph Rawlinson, Helen Thoburn, and Donald MacGillivray, eds., *The Chinese Church, as Revealed in the National Christian Conference Held in Shanghai, Tuesday, May 2, to Thursday, May 11, 1922* (Shanghai: The Oriental Press, 1922), 635-8.

<sup>56</sup> China Continuation Committee, and National Christian Council of China, *China Mission Year Book* (Shanghai: Christian Literature Society for China, 1925), 127.

<sup>57</sup> Wang, 'The Church Unity Movement in Early-Twentieth Century China,' 223.



all over China. Watchman Nee, largely based in Shanghai, led his 'Little Flock' across vast areas of China. Besides these movements led by well-known Christian leaders, the Jesus Family was conducting a communal Christian life in rural areas of Shandong province, and the True Jesus Church (TJC) had been growing explosively for more than a decade.<sup>58</sup>

Apart from the independent church movements initiated and led by Chinese Christian leaders, the Sino-Japanese war (1937-45) unexpectedly presented an opportunity for church unity among the Chinese Christians. When the Japanese demanded a collaboration of Chinese church leaders by accepting Japanese pastors and YMCA workers, some Chinese church leaders, having long disliked the denominational splits among Chinese Protestants, actually welcomed some of the movements toward unity pushed by the Japanese.<sup>59</sup> Timothy Brook comments that the Japanese occupation actually caused the Chinese churches to become substantially united and independent from Western missions.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, when the war ended in 1945, mission-church relations became sensitive as Western missionaries returned to their previous working places. While some missionaries tried to avoid simply replacing their Chinese colleagues, others assumed that they should be in charge. Inevitably, tension arose in mission-church relations in the post-war time.<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>58</sup> Bays, *A New History*, 124.

<sup>59</sup> Ibid., 143-144.

<sup>60</sup> Timothy Brook, 'Toward Independence: Christianity in China under the Japanese Occupation, 1937-1945,' in *Christianity in China: From the Eighteenth Century to the Present*, ed. Daniel H. Bays (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996), 337.

<sup>61</sup> Bays, *A New History*, 147.

As paternalism was more of an internal issue of the mission-church relationship unrelated to the adjustment of Christian worldview or doctrine, more Protestants, both liberals like Cheng Jingyi, those in the NCC and the CCC, and conservatives like Song Shangjie, Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee, tried to foster independence and indigenisation of the Chinese church. However, underlying the aspiration to independence and indigenisation was the spirit of nationalism and the perceived need of severing the relations with Western imperialism, which were hot issues in the socio-political context of the time. In this sense, in their responses to the issue of paternalism, both liberal and conservative Protestants expressed their concern and engaged with important issues in the socio-political context.

### 2.1.3 Responses to the Fundamentalist-Modernist Controversy

The third concern was the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, which initially emerged among the churches in the U.S. There had been evangelical revivals among the American churches in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. However, as modernism rose, in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> century, Charles Darwin's theory of biological evolution by natural selection and its effects on German higher criticism in the field of biblical studies posed serious challenges to Christianity and its traditional doctrines. In response to the challenges, some Christians adjusted traditional doctrines to adapt to modernist thought. By the end of the 1910s, modernism influenced almost all the leading American theological seminaries, and more than half of Protestant publications leaned towards modernism.<sup>62</sup> However, conservative

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<sup>62</sup> George M. Marsden, *Understanding Fundamentalism and Evangelicalism* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1991), 33.

Christians strongly opposed modernists and their adjustments and, in their militant offense against them, formed a group called the fundamentalists. While modernists considered themselves as improving traditional Christianity by way of modern reform, fundamentalists considered attacking the modernist approach as a way of safeguarding the authority of the Bible and the integrity of Christian doctrines. In the Scopes trial of 1925, the fundamentalists won the legal case but bore a negative image in American public life. After the trial, they lost their public place in society and instead went on to establish their own subculture within American society.<sup>63</sup> Yet, fundamentalists continued their militant attack against modernists.

It is undeniable that the missionaries in China were influenced by the fundamentalist-modernist controversy that was taking place in the U.S. This became clear in the 1920s as China was a major mission field of the American missionaries and many of them brought higher criticism, the social gospel and liberal theology to China. At this time, street preaching and tract distribution were no longer the primary evangelistic method for the modernist missionaries.<sup>64</sup> Instead, their primary interest lay in reinterpreting Christian doctrines to make them compatible with new theories and discoveries like natural and social evolution.<sup>65</sup> Akin to what happened back in their home countries, many conservative missionaries endeavoured to enlarge their own institutions while launching militant offense against modernists. From the 1890s to the 1920s, membership increased among the conservative missions such as the

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<sup>63</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>64</sup> Valentin H. Rabe, *The Home Base of American China Missions, 1880-1920* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1978), 81.

<sup>65</sup> Kevin Xiyi Yao, *The Fundamentalist Movement Among Protestant Missionaries in China, 1920-1937* (Lanham, Maryland; Oxford: University Press of America, 2003), 40.

CIM, the Christian and Mission Alliance (CMA), and the Bible Union of China.<sup>66</sup>

When the NCC and the CCC were established mainly by Chinese Protestant liberals like Cheng Jingyi in the 1920s, conservative missions, including the CMA, the major Lutheran bodies and the Southern Baptists refused to join. The CIM joined the NCC initially, but soon withdrew from it. Criticising the NCC and the CCC for holding to modernist theology, these conservative groups cautioned that they were to be avoided at all costs.<sup>67</sup> Meanwhile, conservatives tried to spread the orthodox message in the mission fields and carefully checked against modernist influence in their own mission boards. By the 1920s, among missionaries, the deep division between modernists and fundamentalists was no longer a debatable question but had reached the stage of open controversy.<sup>68</sup>

Being influenced by American modernist missionaries, some of the Chinese Protestants accepted modernism and modernist theology. During this time, a large majority of the Chinese Protestant intellectuals were theological liberals. As they were educated abroad or in mission colleges, these Chinese liberals were able to bring into Chinese Christian circles the same spirit as that of the New Culture Movement.<sup>69</sup> They later actively responded to the May Fourth intellectuals, the anti-Christians and the anti-imperialists. They followed Social Darwinism as they believed in the evolution of human societies.<sup>70</sup> Chinese theologians and intellectuals,

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<sup>66</sup> Ibid., 45.

<sup>67</sup> Ibid., 183-230.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid., 48.

<sup>69</sup> Paul Hutchinson, 'The Conservative Reaction in China,' *The Journal of Religion* 2 (July 1922): 340-57, 350. Quoted in Yao, 41-42.

<sup>70</sup> Ling, 78.

like Zhao Zichen, Xu Baoqing, Liu Tingfang and Wu Yaozong who responded to the quest for China's modernisation, were all followers of modernism and modernist theology. Cheng Jingyi and Yu Rizhang, leaders of the NCC, believed that social transformation could be achieved through the application of an ethical Christianity in China.<sup>71</sup> When the anti-Christian movement became worse from 1925 to 1927, the NCC included more and more social and political elements into its message to Chinese churches and Christians. However, modernists' engagement with the context did not bring desirable results. Through the 1920s, the nationalism promoted by members of the Life Fellowship through *Life Quarterly* was vague because they were silent on political power, political systems and imperialism in the anti-Christian movement. From 1925 to 1927, the articles in *Life Quarterly* only repeated previous themes. Gradually, Life Fellowship members gave up appealing to the non-Christian public and turned their attention to Chinese churches and church related issues.<sup>72</sup> Likewise, from 1926 to 1927, the NCC's renewing emphasis on the spiritual life of the church seemed to indicate the ineffectiveness of their message of social engagement.<sup>73</sup> Modernists' presentation of Christianity and its relation to Chinese culture and society did not bring considerable influence on non-Christian Chinese people.

When the Chinese modernists embraced modernism and engaged with Chinese culture and society, conservatives also took their stand in the

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<sup>71</sup> Wang, 'The Church Unity Movement in Early-Twentieth Century China,' 190-193.

<sup>72</sup> Ling, 95-96.

<sup>73</sup> Wang, 'The Church Unity Movement in Early-Twentieth Century China,' 194.

fundamentalist-modernist controversy and reflected accordingly, with Wang Mingdao as the most well-known fundamentalist who criticised modernists as unbelievers. When modernists were engaged in presenting Christianity to the secular society, leading conservative preachers, like Song Shangjie, Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee, were preoccupied with their evangelical faith. When the anti-Christian movement came in wave after wave beginning in 1922, these conservative preachers experienced significant church growth rather than responded to the anti-Christian and anti-imperialist movements. In a wartime of devastation, the Chinese people seemed more receptive to the conservative's message of repentance and regeneration than to a message of physical or material release.<sup>74</sup> Besides an effective gospel message, the conservative's independence in finance and administration also helped them to manage and grow in times of social turmoil. Three major independent churches, the True Jesus Church, the Jesus Family and the Little Flock, all continued to grow into the late 1940s.

It is clear that Chinese modernist Protestants stood in the same line with American modernist missionaries insofar as they all, in their belief and practice, embraced modernism. Having enthusiasm for a better China, they were engaged in socio-political change, sometimes with the cost of adjusting Christian belief, in order to pursue their ambition for both the church and the country. In contrast, Chinese conservatives rejected modernism because they understood it as being contradictory to Christian doctrine. However, at the same time, some conservatives were engaged

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<sup>74</sup> Bays, *A New History*, 147.

in a militant offensive against modernists. In this sense, conservatives were not necessarily proposing an other-worldly worldview. What they attacked was modernism rather than matters in the world. As it was mentioned earlier, their engagement in developing independent and indigenous churches was an indication of their concern for nationalism and for severing relations with Western imperialism. Nevertheless, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy became an obstacle to church union at this stage.<sup>75</sup> For example, the NCC insisted that Protestant communities in China should be able to unite on the basis of a common Christian faith, despite their ecclesiastical or theological differences. Based on this understanding, the NCC took a theologically neutral stand and was unwilling to include some ‘orthodox doctrines’ that would satisfy conservatives. For these reasons, conservative groups like the North Jiangsu Mission and the CIM withdrew from the NCC.<sup>76</sup> The division between conservatives and modernists therefore became a serious hindrance to the church unity movement in early 20<sup>th</sup> century China.

## 2.2 Christian Responses under the Young PRC (1949-1966)

The previous survey of the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century has shown China’s complex context and a diversity of Christian responses to that context. After the establishment of the PRC in 1949, China became a socialist country ruled by the CCP. Becoming the sole ruling party in China by means of revolution and civil war,

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<sup>75</sup> Cheng Jingyi, ‘Zhongguo Jidujiao de Xingzhi he Zhuangtai’ [The Nature and State of Christianity in China], *Wenshe Yuekan* [*Wenshe Monthly*] 2, no. 7 (1927): 60-61.

<sup>76</sup> Wang, ‘The Church Unity Movement in Early-Twentieth Century China,’ 203.

the CCP had the power to promote its ideology and implement its policy. With regard to Christianity, the CCP's view had been revealed earlier in the 1920s when it played an active role in the anti-Christian movements.<sup>77</sup> As a party following Marxism, the CCP viewed religion as 'opium of the people,' perceived Christianity as a tool of Western imperialism and determined to cut off any tie between domestic and foreign Christians, especially Christians from the West. Yet, in the early 1950s, with the so-called united front policy, the CCP called on all possible people groups to contribute to the development of socialist China while launching attacks against those who were defined by the CCP as enemies of the people. During this time, in response to strong waves of socialism and the CCP's united front policy, two dominant approaches emerged among Protestants: (1) accommodation, an accommodation of socialism and engagement with the socio-political context, and (2) resistance, a resisting of the CCP's religious policy and disengagement from the socio-political context.

### 2.2.1 The Approach of Accommodation

When the CCP launched various patriotic movements like denunciation, thought reform and re-education for Protestants in the early 1950s, many Protestants accommodated and participated in these movements. Through the movements, Christians were required to denounce Western imperialism, receive thought reform and participate in re-education programs conducted by the CCP. Being perceived as the former running dog of Western imperialism, Christians were forced to cut off

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<sup>77</sup> Yamamoto, 127-31, 139.



their tie with Western missions and imperialism. In response, modernists like Wu Yaozong, Zhao Zichen, Bishop Ding Guangxun and leaders of the NCC, YMCA, YWCA and the Christian Literature Society (*Wenshe*) actively participated in these movements. In contrast, many conservatives, willingly or not, were dragged into these movements, being either the accused or the accusers among their colleagues.

Besides accommodation to the CCP's initiatives of launching patriotic movements, some Protestants, mainly modernists, developed their understanding in response to the CCP. At this time, the slogan 'Love-Country-Love-Religion' (*aiguo-aijiao*), as discussed among Protestants, referred to the love of the motherland and the love of the church.<sup>78</sup> In terms of the love of the motherland, namely patriotism, the slogan included the goals of being anti-imperialist and 'seeking the common ground' (*qiu tong*) between church and state, which required a radical departure from the traditional Protestant view of church-state separation. In terms of the love for the church, the slogan stressed the Chinese church's independence from foreign, especially Western, churches. At the same time, it advocated 'reserving differences' (*cun yi*) and promoting unification of Protestants in China.<sup>79</sup> While the slogan might not be universally welcome by Protestants, it was appreciated by modernists. Being educated at Christian colleges and universities in America and in Britain, modernists naturally embraced the practical concerns of science, human progress and social justice. Early in the 1940s, modernists like Wu Yaozong already looked to the forces

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<sup>78</sup> *Aiguo* is literally rendered as 'love country.' However, it is mainly translated as 'patriotic.' Hence, it is tying patriotism to a nation-state.

<sup>79</sup> Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground*, 114-15.

of Communism to usher in the divine transformation of society.<sup>80</sup> To Wu, since God is at work in society, participation in the development of the socialist China is to work towards the realisation of the kingdom of God on earth. Zhao Zichen, from an ethical perspective, found the moral excellence of Jesus as being something to contribute in the making of the new China.<sup>81</sup>

Motivated by the slogan and based on the mutual interest of Wu Yaozong and China's first premier Zhou Enlai, in 1950 when the Korean War broke out, the 'Preparatory Committee for the Resist-America-Aid-Korea Three Self Reform Movement' of the Protestant church was set up to carry out the CCP's united front policy for Protestants. In the same year, the *Christian Manifesto* was drafted by Wu and sent out for a collection of signatures amongst Protestants. By 1953, it was reportedly signed by nearly half of the Protestant population.<sup>82</sup> In 1954, 232 delegates of Protestant leaders were selected in Beijing and announced the formal establishment of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement (TSPM), which was intended to call on all Protestants in supporting the Communist regime under the banner of patriotism. At this time, Evangelicals might not agree with modernists in terms of theology. However, Evangelicals like Jia Yuming, Chen Chonggui and Yang Shaotang joined the TSPM from its outset, though with concerns different from

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<sup>80</sup> Lee-ming Ng, 'Christianity and Social Change: The Case in China, 1920-1950' (ThD diss., Princeton Theological Seminary, 1970), 204-26.

<sup>81</sup> Harvey, *Acquainted with Grief*, 30.

<sup>82</sup> Luo Zhufeng, ed., *Religion under Socialism in China*, trans. Donald E. MacInnis and Zheng Xi-an (Armonk, New York: M.E. Sharpe, Inc. 1991), 57.

modernists.<sup>83</sup> Perhaps because they were influential Evangelical figures who might exercise influence over Evangelicals, they were elected as three among the six vice chairpersons of the TSPM in 1954. Watchman Nee's attitude was initially ambiguous, but he later also led the Little Flock to join the TSPM. Wang Weifan, at that time a theological student who was influenced by Jia Yuming and Yang Shaotang yet upheld patriotism and Chinese culture, also expressed his support and soon joined the TSPM. Then, in the following years until the eruption of the Cultural Revolution in 1966, the TSPM gathered a great number of Protestants and functioned as an official parachurch organisation that implemented the CCP's religious policy among many Protestant churches.

The establishment of the PRC and Protestants' approach of accommodation indicate that the concerns in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, like modernisation and paternalism, continued to shape the period 1950s-1960s. The establishment of an independent socialist China marked a milestone in the Chinese history, and a call for a contribution to the development of socialist China intended to continue the quest for a modernised China. The TSPM was then an indication of Protestants' patriotism and support of China's move towards modernisation. Concerning paternalism, the

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<sup>83</sup> For example, Jia considered joining the TSPM as an exchange of allowing his ministry and publication to continue in the socialist China. 'Jia Yuming Mushi de Cantong Jiaoxun' [A Painful Lesson of Pastor Jia Yuming], China Aid, 16 February 2015, [https://www.chinaaid.net/2015/02/blog-post\\_50.html](https://www.chinaaid.net/2015/02/blog-post_50.html).

Chen viewed the TSPM and the Communist regime as bringing an end to foreign missions' superiority over the Chinese Christians. Bays, *A New History*, 166-67.

Yang joined the TSPM probably due to political pressures. 'Dui Yang Shaotang Mushi de Butong Kanfa' [A Different View on Pastor Yang Shaotang], Blog. Sina, last modified 13 May 2009, [http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog\\_5ed528370100dkgr.html](http://blog.sina.com.cn/s/blog_5ed528370100dkgr.html). Cf. Bian Yunbo, 'Shen Suo Shiyong de Ren zhi Yang Shaotang Mushi' [Figure Used by God: Pastor Yang Shaotang], Church China, accessed 16 April 2019, <https://www.churchchina.org/archives/we151021-2.html>.

independent PRC was able to sever all foreign control and expel imperialism from China. As to Protestant Christianity, the denunciation movement, thought reform and re-education movements were all carried out with the purpose of severing all ties with foreign missions and imperialism, therefore making the Chinese Protestants independent from foreign missions and Christianity.

### 2.2.2 The Approach of Resistance

The approach of resistance was taken up by conservative Evangelicals, especially self-identified fundamentalists like Wang Mingdao, who refused to work with modernists or accommodate the CCP's policy. In the November 1951 issue of *Lingshi Jikan (Spiritual Food Quarterly)*, Wang referred to modernists like Wu Yaozong, who had accommodated the CCP's religious policy, as spiritually dead, and indicated that he had been aware of such spiritual death as early as in 1927.<sup>84</sup> This criticism indicated the continuous effect of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the 1950s. Wu's proposal of a realisation of the kingdom of God on earth was an evidence of unbelief to fundamentalists like Wang, who attacked Wu and some of his colleges as modernists and the 'party of the unbelievers.' Naturally, Wang's approach of resistance against modernists and the TSPM was shared by many conservative Evangelicals, including Lin Xiangao, who was a junior associate of Wang in Guangzhou, and Yuan Xiangchen, who was the pastor of an independent church in Beijing. As the controversy continued, Bishop Ding Guangxun responded to Wang Mingdao's criticism, arguing that China was moving towards progress

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<sup>84</sup> Lyall, 136.

through socialist reconstruction, and Christians with theological differences should practice mutual respect based on love.<sup>85</sup> Meanwhile, the Evangelical Wang Weifan, who then joined the TSPM, published a few articles on *Tian Feng* in support of the TSPM. Based on observation during his study at the NUTS, Wang denied the existence of the ‘party of the unbelievers,’ and argued that differences between various Christian traditions were just minor.<sup>86</sup>

Apart from the influence of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, many conservatives refused to join government-led movements and the TSPM also because cooperation with the CCP’s religious policy would bring theological consequences. For example, for the church to legally exist in socialist China, it had to stand in agreement with the CCP, ‘define its enemies as the state’s enemies, its doctrine in light of the state’s doctrine, and its mission in light of the state’s mission.’<sup>87</sup> Specifically, sin was understood as failure to denounce, exclude and punish the enemies of the new socialist China.<sup>88</sup> Naturally, some conservatives considered cooperation with the CCP a compromise of church independence and Christian doctrine. When the *Christian Manifesto* was sent out for collection of signatures, it was perceived by some conservatives as a political betrayal of the church.<sup>89</sup> Therefore, many of them chose to resist rather than comply with the CCP’s policy.

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<sup>85</sup> Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground*, 168.

<sup>86</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Women Sui Duo, Reng Shi Yige Shenti’ [Although We Are Many, We Are Still One Body], *Tian Feng* [Heavenly Wind], no. 5 (1955): 5.

<sup>87</sup> Thomas Alan Harvey, ‘Challenging Heaven’s Mandate: An Analysis of the Conflict between Wang Mingdao and the Chinese Nation-State’ (PhD diss., Duke University, 1998), 101.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 90.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 82.

As a result of conservatives' resistance, independent churches like the Christian Tabernacle, the Jesus Family and the TJC all underwent oppression by the CCP. In addition, conservative leaders like Wang Mingdao, Lin Xiangao, Yuan Xiangchen, and other well-known figures like Li Tian-en, Xie Moshan, Jing Dianying of the Jesus Family, and Wei En-bo of the TJC, were also arrested and imprisoned for years.

It is noted that some of those who joined the TSPM were also denounced at a later time. Zhao Zichen and Wang Weifan were identified and attacked among the 'rightists' in the Anti-Rightist Movement, and they also experienced repression during the Cultural Revolution. Watchman Nee was also oppressed and imprisoned for many years until his death. His Little Flock was banned and had to go underground. Other conservatives, like Jia Yuming, Chen Chonggui and Yang Shaotang, failed to cooperate with the TSPM and the CCP therefore experienced repression as well. These repressed figures were Evangelical in theology, an exception being Zhao Zichen, who by then had turned from liberal theology to neo-Orthodox theology, which was relatively conservative as well. The reason for their repression might be that, guided by conservative theology, their way of cooperation could not satisfy the CCP.

It is now clear that while the establishment of the PRC marked the beginning of a new China, modernisation, paternalism and the fundamentalist-modernist controversy continued to shape the 1950s-60s. The Cultural Revolution, as a national disaster, caused a ten-year interruption of both China's development and Christianity's religious activities. However, when the Reform and Opening Up

policy started, modernisation, paternalism and the fundamentalist-modernist controversy all shaped the discourse of the 1980s. Modernisation shaped the CCP's rhetoric towards a 'scientific' worldview and a Marxist's view that religion is the opium of the masses. Paternalism then shaped the CCP's propaganda against 'foreign infiltration.' As to the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, it shaped the discourse of whether or not to join the TSPM. However, the situation became complex in the 1980s, given that the vast majority of Protestants were Evangelicals. Protestants' decisions were then not simply based on taking a side in the controversy. Rather, concerns like different views of church-state relationship and ministry strategy may have played a significant role in their decision-making.

### 2.3 Conclusion

The previous historical summary reveals that from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century to the mid-1960s, China experienced a series of dramatic socio-political changes. The quest for a modernised China and the criticism from Chinese intellectuals urged Protestant intellectuals to respond to various waves of socio-political movement. The engagement in promoting independence and indigeneity of the Chinese church indicated both modernists' and conservatives' concern for nationalism and the church's relationship with Western imperialism. The split between fundamentalists and modernists revealed different approaches toward modernism, which was the rising ethos of the time. Although they took various approaches with multiple concerns, Protestants were struggling and evolving in a dramatically changing socio-political context in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

Both modernists and conservatives faced the forceful socialist movements under the Communist regime beginning in 1949. It was generally modernists who embraced socialist China and accommodated the CCP's religious policy, while conservatives refused the TSPM, resisted the CCP and disengaged with the socio-political context. Because the Cultural Revolution (1966-76) caused chaos to both society and the Protestant church with the TSPM ceasing to function, there is little to discuss about this period. Nevertheless, the exploration and discussion so far has provided an overall historical picture of how Protestants dealt with the socio-political context. When the Reform and Opening Up policy started at the end of the 1970s and the TSPM resumed its function in early 1980s, Protestants would have to deal with new changes in the socio-political context. It is under the new context from the 1980s that the four selected Evangelical church figures develop their theologies and socio-political approaches.





### III. LIN XIANGAO'S EXHORTATION REGARDING ETERNAL REWARDS

This chapter explores and discusses Lin Xiangao's socio-political approach in his theology.<sup>1</sup> Lin was a junior and close associate of Wang Mingdao, who was one of the most prominent Protestant pastors in contemporary Chinese church history. Being influenced by his senior associate, Lin was conservative in theology and a firm opponent of the TSPM. Lin is well-known for his Christian piety, productive ministry and decades of suffering under oppression. Because of these facts, there has been a general impression that Lin did not express interest in society or politics.

However, this chapter will explain that the major theological themes in his thought—for example, his emphases on living a pious Christian life and on the seeking of eternal rewards—carried significant socio-political implications. With these two emphases, Lin seemed to understand Christianity as a private faith, and his silence on society and politics appeared to be a way of disengagement with the socio-political context. Nevertheless, his exhortation regarding eternal rewards urged Christians as a community to actively live out a pious Christian life in the present world. Under this paradigm, the Christian community's call to live a pious Christian life was translated into an insistence upon an independent existence. This independent existence became radical in the socialist China in which the CCP assumed leadership, even control, over religious affairs. When an independent existence combined with his silence on society and politics, Lin's seemingly

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<sup>1</sup> A revised version of this chapter is forthcoming in 2020 in *Studies in World Christianity* as 'Samuel Lamb's Exhortation Regarding Eternal Rewards: A Socio-Political Perspective.'

disengagement from the socio-political context turned out to be his radical way of engaging it. Along such lines in the discussion on Lin's socio-political approach, John Howard Yoder's understanding of 'the politics of Jesus' will be introduced as a lens that aids the present description and analysis of Lin's approach.

### 3.1 Profile of Lin Xiangao

Lin Xiangao was born to a Christian family in Macao in 1924. His grandparents and parents were Christians—his maternal grandfather as well as his father being Chinese Baptist ministers. Before Lin was born, his parents named him 'Xian-gao,' the meaning of which symbolised the child Xian-gao as being an 'offering' to the 'Lamb.' In his early school years, Lin attended a boarding school in Guangzhou. Due to the Japanese invasion, however, Lin's family later fled to Hong Kong where he studied at Queen's College. In 1942, when Hong Kong fell into the hands of the Japanese army, Lin and his family fled again to Zhaoqing, Guangdong and then to Wuzhou, Guangxi, where he had an opportunity to study at the Alliance Bible Institute. However, when Wuzhou was in imminent threat of Japanese attack, Lin and his family fled to Jiangkou and Penghua in Guangxi province before turning back to Zhaoqing. Because of their frequent moves, Lin was not able to complete a program or degree. His correspondence course under Chicago's Moody Bible Institute was also terminated when Guangzhou was 'liberated' by the Communists in 1949.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> For further biographical details of Lin Xiangao, see Zheng Lan, *Xinxiang de Shifeng: Lin Xiangao Jianzheng* [*Fragrance of Service: The Testimony of Samuel Lamb*] (Hong Kong: Tien Dao Publishing House Ltd, 1998), 24-79. See also Anderson, *Bold as A Lamb*.

Although Lin's studies were continually interrupted, he returned to Guangzhou in early 1945 and started serving as a pastor in several churches. In April 1950, Lin formed a small church at his own home in the Da Ma Zhan district. Lin was a member of the Baptist church and was associated with the Assemblies of God denomination, yet he named the church Da Ma Zhan Gospel Church (*Da Ma Zhan Fuyin Tang*), for the express purpose of avoiding any denominational label. In October, Lin was invited to lecture at the Ecclesia Theological Seminary (Assemblies of God) in Hong Kong. Later in 1951, he was invited twice to work as a faculty member there. Lin declined these invitations, for he was convinced that he had been called to serve in Guangzhou.

Starting in the early 1940s, Lin was significantly influenced by and associated with Wang Mingdao, a senior and very influential pastor in Beijing.<sup>3</sup> After the CCP's takeover of China in 1949, Lin was deeply inspired by Wang's perseverance during the Japanese occupation. In their correspondences, Wang confirmed that his attitude toward the pressure from the Communists was as firm as in the time of the Japanese occupation.<sup>4</sup> When the pressure of joining the TSPM became intense, like Wang, Lin refused to cooperate. In September 1955, a few weeks after the imprisonment of Wang, Lin was arrested and imprisoned for his faith. Lin was released in January 1957, and soon after, he resumed the duties of ministry at the Da Ma Zhan Gospel Church. In May 1958, as the Anti-Rightist

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<sup>3</sup> Lin describes Wang Mingdao as 'an excellent Bible commentator, prophet of new life, and believer who strictly obeys the highest requirements of the word of God.' Lin Xiangao, *Jiaohui Jianshi* [*A Concise History of the Church*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2006), 50.

<sup>4</sup> Zheng, 75-77.

Movement became increasingly intense, Lin was suddenly arrested again with the charge of being counter-revolutionary, anti-Soviet Union, pro-imperialist, and an underling of Wang Mingdao. For these alleged crimes, he received twenty years of imprisonment as his sentence. Lin survived the numerous dangers of work accidents while in the prison and was released in May 1978.

When religious policy became relatively lenient in the early 1980s, Lin restarted his house church in Guangzhou with his congregation soon growing to several hundred in number. However, from the late 1980s, Lin and his church faced government harassment from time to time. In February 1990, Lin's church was ransacked by police officials, and he was detained for investigation. Nevertheless, he was released after twenty-one hours, probably due to increasing international pressure toward the Chinese government as Lin had become widely known and several foreign governments had expressed their concerns regarding his detention. In the following years, government officials and TSPM leaders summoned Lin many times, requesting him to join the TSPM. Lin refused and continued to keep his church independent. In time, the government and the TSPM no longer took action against him or his church.<sup>5</sup> Throughout the years beginning in the early 1980s, numerous foreign Christians, pastors, journalists, celebrities, and diplomatic officials visited Lin and his church. By the time Lin died in 2013 and his funeral drew about

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<sup>5</sup> In 2000, Lin's church was transferred to Rong Gui Li district in Guangzhou and named Rong Gui Li Church. In December 2018, five years after Lin's death, and then under new waves of oppression, Rong Gui Li Church was officially banned by the local government.

thirty thousand Christians, he had become one of the most well-known Protestant pastors in China.<sup>6</sup>

### 3.2 Lin's Theology

During the 1950s, and then later beginning in 1979, Lin wrote a series of about two hundred books called *Lingyin (Spiritual Voice)*.<sup>7</sup> In these writings, Lin did not seek to produce academic works. Though on certain occasions, he briefly mentioned some of the different academic opinions on the issue at hand, he mostly did not discuss any theological debates in depth, but rather, simply presented his own understanding and position. This is because Lin's primary purpose for writing *Lingyin*, as he normally indicated at the beginning and end of each of its volumes, was to provide pastoral guidance and exhortation to meet the needs of Chinese Christians. In this regard, Lin's writings touched on a wide range of areas, for example ethics and devotion, systematic theology, contextual issues, apologetics, biblical studies and personal testimony. For the purposes of the present study, this chapter will focus on Lin's writings concerning the pious Christian life, eternal rewards and politics, and discuss how they are tied into his socio-political approach.

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<sup>6</sup> Anderson describes Lin as having become, by the late 1980s, something of a 'bishop' for the house churches, serving as their bellwether, apostle, and patriarch. Lin's hymns, booklets, and cassettes were widely distributed and appreciated by numerous pastors and churches across vast areas of China. Anderson, 155. This description of Lin as bishop is Anderson's, and it helps to describe Lin as a prominent figure for the house churches. However, Lin was not officially consecrated as a bishop, nor was he addressed by Chinese Christians as such.

<sup>7</sup> All Lin's books quoted in this thesis are included in his *Lingyin* series. Therefore, the bibliography will simply list '*Lingyin Congshu [Series of Spiritual Voice]*' as Lin's primary sources.

### 3.2.1 The Pious Christian Life

As Lin intends to exhort Christian readers, he dedicates a significant portion of *Lingyin* to address the pious Christian life. Lin's concept of the pious Christian life is characterised by an emphasis upon active action. Contrary to the view that considers inactivity as being spiritual, Lin insists that a truly spiritual person should actively live and work during this life, for God wants the Christian to first being 'out' of this world and then being 'in' it.<sup>8</sup> In other words, after learning that the Christian is not of this world, he or she should learn to actively live in this world. In his discussion on 'spiritual life' (*sheng ming*) and 'daily life' (*sheng huo*), Lin explains,

We should not lay particular stress on one side: either spiritual life or daily life. Spiritual life is only about salvation; yet after receiving salvation, one must live out a good life – abundant and more abundant life. When the spiritual life is abundant, it will express itself in daily life. More abundant spiritual life will express in more abundant daily life. We should not just talk about spiritual life, abundant spiritual life and more abundant spiritual life, yet without any good deeds. It is a disproportion between spiritual life and daily life.<sup>9</sup>

Lin here indicates that the Christian should not stop at receiving salvation (spiritual life) because his or her spiritual life should be reflected in daily life. Meanwhile, Lin views the Christian's good deeds in daily life as important signs of reflection of one's spiritual life.

In pursuing an abundant life, Lin believes that the Christian must overcome three enemies: the world, one's self, and the devil. With regard to the world, Lin refers to the ethos, the habits and the ways of life in the world.<sup>10</sup> He perceives the

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<sup>8</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Buyi de Guanjia* [*Unrighteous steward*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2012), 11.

<sup>9</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Shengming Yu Shenghuo* [*Spiritual Life and Daily life*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 18.

<sup>10</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Jidutu de Desheng* [*The Christian's Victory*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 6.

world as coming to a time of moral corruption. Examples such as addictions, divorces, night clubs, hospital scandals, student crimes, and broken human relationships all remind Lin of the days of Noah, indicating the last days and Christ's imminent return.<sup>11</sup> Bearing this in mind, Lin urges that 'Christians should distinguish themselves from the people of the world: in their way of dressing, in their deeds, their thoughts, even in their spirit, as this is the way of becoming a holy Christian.'<sup>12</sup> In encouraging a holy Christian life, Lin perceives a sharp contrast between the Christian and the world. This perception of a sharp contrast is also reflected in Lin's address towards some cultural traditions. He agrees that Christians should observe filial piety while their parents were still alive. However, they should avoid ancestral practices which, though originally carried the meaning of filial piety, have evolved to include religious overtones.<sup>13</sup> Lin also puts forth negative connotations upon other cultural traditions, including the giving of money to children in red envelopes as a form of superstition,<sup>14</sup> the use of wreaths for funerals and the distributing of eggs during Easter as having pagan origins,<sup>15</sup> and the celebration of Christmas as a secular and commercial festival.<sup>16</sup> In addressing these cultural traditions, Lin describes how unbiblical they are and admonishes Christians towards avoidance. In other words, the

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<sup>11</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Jidu Zailai Gaiyao* [An Overview of Christ's Second Coming] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 20-29.

<sup>12</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Chengsheng zhi Dao* [The Way of Sanctification] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2006), 30.

<sup>13</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Bai Zuxian Yu Xiaoshun* [Ancestral Practices and Filial Piety] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2006), 3, 11.

<sup>14</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Qiancai de Mihuo* [The Temptation of Money] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 5. When giving money as gift, Chinese tradition calls for wrapping the money in a red envelope.

<sup>15</sup> Lin, *Mixin Fengxu*, 18.

<sup>16</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Yesu Jidu de Jiangsheng* [the Birth of Jesus Christ] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2006), 36-37.



ways of the world, as an enemy of the Christian life, are not meant to be changed but to be avoided or overcome.

Concerning the second enemy, one's 'old self', Lin understands it as a self that is inclined towards sin. Lin perceives that some Christians believe in Jesus for years but still follow their sinful thoughts and practice wicked deeds. In the worst cases, some church leaders manipulate their leadership positions for personal gain, and by doing so, are following the ways of the world.<sup>17</sup> Lin thus understands one's old self, characterised by sinfulness, as tending to lead the Christian to the ways of the world. In overcoming one's old self, the Christian will then be moving towards holiness. Within the 'old self', Lin stresses the seriousness of pride as he perceives that few Christians are truly humble, and some Christians never learn humility during their lifetimes.<sup>18</sup> In line with this, Lin realises that the root of sin cannot be eradicated until the Christian leaves this world.<sup>19</sup> However, instead of expressing frustration, Lin suggests that the Christian deliberately deal with the 'old self' on a daily basis in his or her pursuit of this pious Christian life.

With regard to the third enemy, the devil, Lin understands that Christians are involved in spiritual warfare in which the devil seeks to devour people (1 Pet 5:8), and to overcome it, they should stand against the schemes of the devil by putting on the whole armour of God. This whole armour of God, as described in Ephesians 6:10-17, includes the belt of truth, the breastplate of righteousness, the gospel of

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<sup>17</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Huigai Yu Xinkao* [*Repentance and Trust*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 13-14.

<sup>18</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Jiaoao Yu Qianbei* [*Pride and Humility*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2006), 1.

<sup>19</sup> Lin, *Chengsheng zhi Dao*, 17.

peace, the shield of faith, the helmet of salvation and the sword of the Spirit. With this whole armour, Lin has in mind the whole being of the Christian rather than simply his or her good deeds in spiritual warfare. For example, with regard to the Christian's witness for Christ, Lin explains, "“be witnesses” (Acts 1:8) does not merely refer to preaching, delivering a speech or talking about witness... We do not just talk about witness; we ourselves are witnesses of Christ. Witnesses do not simply testify by speech, but also witness for Christ through deeds even martyrdom.”<sup>20</sup> So, the Christian is called to live out the pious Christian life in deeds as well as in his or her whole being. This view on the whole being of the Christian is also applied in Lin's understanding of religious oppression as a form of spiritual warfare. He understands that in Christians' experience of oppression, they face not only unbelieving relatives and friends but also those within the church that are included amongst the unbelievers (*bu xin pai*). As the Christian is to wrestle against the devil but not against 'flesh and blood' (Eph.6:12), they should not hate those who persecute the church, for they do not know what they are doing. Instead, Christians should fight against the devil that is stirring in the oppressors' heart.<sup>21</sup> In this view, Lin directs Christians to wrestle against the devil and refrain from hostility towards the oppressors. In other words, the pious Christian life is not always about good deeds. Rather, a loving heart and a godly character also contribute to the pious Christian life and victory over and against the devil.

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<sup>20</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Jidu Sheng Tian* [*Christ's Ascension*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2006), 20.

<sup>21</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Moshi de Jiaohui* [*The Church in the Last Days*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2006),

Lin's emphases on the Christian's good deeds and godly character reveal that he holds the Christian's deliberate effort as crucial in living out the pious Christian life. Apart from these emphases, Lin's value of the Christian's deliberate effort can also be observed from his critical view towards Pentecostal and charismatic teachings, which incline towards the instant work and empowerment by the Holy Spirit.<sup>22</sup> Perhaps the most relevant to the present discussion is Lin's critique that Keswick teaching, which precedes the charismatic and Wesleyan Holiness movements, does not clearly distinguish between being filled with the Holy Spirit and being full of the Holy Spirit.<sup>23</sup> He explains that being filled with the Holy Spirit (*shengling chongman*) is a sudden, temporary empowerment for ministry that happens when needed and as many times as needed, while being full of the Holy Spirit (*manyou shengling*) is preferable to the former as it is a lasting condition for holy daily living. In other words, a constant holy Christian life is preferable to an instant empowerment by the Holy Spirit. Lin explains further that neither being filled nor being full of the Holy Spirit should be the Christian's pursuit.<sup>24</sup> Instead, Lin's implication is that as the Christian constantly lives a holy Christian life, he or she will naturally be filled by or be full of the Holy Spirit. Lin therefore proposes a holy Christian life lived out by the Christian's effort, and the Christian's spiritual condition is just a natural effect of a holy life. It is noted that while associated with

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<sup>22</sup> Lin holds various critiques against the latter, including inaccurate interpretation of the scriptures, over-emphasising spiritual experience, paying less attention to the word of God, and taking examples of the Pentecostal experiences in Acts as imperative teaching. Cf. Lin Xiangao, *Zhengque Renshi Shengling* [*Understanding the Holy Spirit Correctly*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 1, 20.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 30.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 43.

the Assemblies of God denomination at least in the 1950s, Lin realised the lukewarm even cold spirituality of many Evangelicals and the spiritual enthusiasm of Pentecostal and charismatic Christians.<sup>25</sup> He himself experienced a divine healing at an early age, and he realised the power of the Holy Spirit.<sup>26</sup> Therefore, although being critical, Lin did not really hold a view that opposed Pentecostals or charismatics. Nevertheless, in his framework of the pious Christian life, what really matters is the Christian's effort. He considers the Christian's continuous and deliberate effort, rather than sudden and temporary manifestations of the power of the Holy Spirit, as contributing to the formation of the pious Christian life.<sup>27</sup> One may be curious regarding why Lin highly emphasises the Christian's effort. The following section on Lin's view of eternal rewards will examine the answer for this question.

### 3.2.2 Eternal Rewards

While the pious Christian life is a common theme within the various streams of Christianity, it historically has not been uniformly expressed. Christian hermits in the third and fourth centuries, for example, disavowed any expression of Christian piety that allowed for integration with the Roman Empire. Centuries later, Christian

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<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>26</sup> Lin was impressed by what his mother told him: 'Only the Holy Spirit gives unction (for preaching)'. Anderson, 33.

<sup>27</sup> It is noticeable that Wang Weifan, an Evangelical leader in the TSPM system and contemporary of Lin, had charismatic experiences including seeing visions, bodily shaking, and speaking in tongues. Nonetheless, he did not attach importance to the charismatic movement or to mystical experiences. Unlike Lin, however, it is suggested that Wang's disfavour towards charismatic manifestations is due to his strong Confucian emphasis upon moderation (*zhong yong*) and etiquette. Cf. Bao Zhaohui, 'Wang Weifan Lingxiu Tezhi Yanjiu' [Study on the Characteristics of Wang Weifan's Spiritual Formation], in Yao and Song, 253.

traditions associated with the Wesleyan-Holiness movements emphasised not societal separation, but ‘Christian perfection.’ Aside from these specific expressions, it is not difficult to see how living the pious Christian life can simply be understood as a timeless biblical teaching. In Lin’s case, his understanding of the pious Christian life is heavily characterised by the vital role of the Christian’s effort. Interestingly, Lin’s value of the Christian’s effort can also be understood through his exhortation regarding eternal rewards, which, he explains, depend upon the Christian’s striving in life and work on earth.

Like many Evangelicals, Lin clearly advocates the notions of ‘justification by faith’ and ‘once saved, always saved.’<sup>28</sup> Even so, Lin believes that while salvation has already been secured, living out the pious Christian life is practically important because, when Christians one day face God’s judgement, each will receive either eternal rewards or suffer loss. Lin bases his view of eternal rewards primarily on ‘*shang fa zai wo*’ (‘My reward and punishment are with me’) in Revelation 22:12. He notices that in the original language, the text only says, ‘My reward is with me,’ yet the Chinese Union Bible translation is ‘My reward and punishment are with me.’ Nevertheless, Lin prefers the Chinese translation while interpreting punishment not as real punishment but as a kind of loss (*kui sun*).<sup>29</sup>

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<sup>28</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Yici De Jiu, Yongyuan De Jiu* [Once Saved, Always Saved] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 1. However, unlike most Calvinists, Lin insists that because of human free will, people are able to refuse to believe in Jesus and/or God. Cf. Lin Xiangao, *Shen de Xingxiang* [The Image of God] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 3.

<sup>29</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Shang Fa Zai Wo* [My Reward and Punishment Are with Me] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 1.

Lin explains that rewards are conditional since they are based on deeds (Col 2:18; 2 Jn 1:8; Rev 3:11), and conditions for gaining rewards include one's own labour (1 Cor 3:8), being holy in daily life, showing kindness to the poor, receiving prophets and the righteous, seeking God, enduring oppression, being faithful, and gaining spiritual victory.<sup>30</sup> On the contrary, if Christians love the world or become wicked and lazy, they will not receive rewards but will suffer loss when their life and work are judged.<sup>31</sup> Likewise, Christians who fail to endure suffering, who fall and go astray, will also suffer loss. In worse cases, pastors who pursue fame, wealth, power, and comfort will suffer loss in the final judgment.<sup>32</sup> Here Lin sees various contrasts among Christians. He distinguishes between the hard-working and the lazy, the holy and the wicked, the faithful and the unfaithful. All these contrasts lead to a contrast between rewards and loss. Lin's rationale for these contrasts is that a righteous God will not treat cold and unfaithful Christians in the same way as those who gain victory in their life and work.<sup>33</sup> As a consequence, the former will suffer loss, and the latter will receive rewards based on their deeds.

Besides this rationale, a tripartite view of the human, which implies three kinds of salvation for the spirit, the soul, and the body, also inspires Lin.<sup>34</sup> Lin understands salvation of the spirit as the first step of salvation, which is done by Christ alone. Regarding salvation of the soul, Lin explains,

If we get rid of all defilement, receive the truth and bring ourselves to die on the cross, God will make our souls alive. This is salvation of the soul. When

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid., 20.

<sup>31</sup> Ibid., 5.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 38.

<sup>33</sup> Ibid., 2.

<sup>34</sup> Lin, *Qizhong Dejiu* [*Seven Kinds of Salvation*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 2.

our spirits are saved, we will never perish. If our souls are not saved in this lifetime, will that affect the salvation of our spirits? Certainly not. Once our spirits are saved, they are always saved (John 10:28). If we deal with ourselves and let the Lord save our souls, then we will receive rewards in the future. If we are not willing to deal with ourselves, though our souls are not saved now, the Lord will still save our souls when he returns. However, we will suffer great loss.<sup>35</sup>

Here Lin links salvation of the soul to one's rewards or loss in eternality, and he considers dealing with the soul, or living out a holy Christian life, as crucial in the salvation of the soul. Regarding salvation of the body, namely the resurrection of the body, Lin understands the resurrected body to have different degrees of glory (1 Cor 15:39-42) which indicate different degrees of rewards.<sup>36</sup> By referring to this visible image of the resurrected body, Lin implies that the difference of rewards in eternity is obvious and substantial, therefore, the Christian ought to take it seriously.

Lin views the issue of rewards and loss as urgent in the Christian's life. Inspired by 1 Corinthians 3:10-15, he portrays a vivid picture of fingers being withdrawn from the fire: though not destroyed, blistery bubbles appear immediately. Lin explains that Christians are not destroyed because of God's grace, yet they will appear like people going through fire due to their unholy Christian life.<sup>37</sup> Lin therefore suggests a healthy fear and advises serious dealing with one's own life and work. He exhorts Christians to run fast and hard in their spiritual journey. They must also guard against a corrupted life and unworthy work,<sup>38</sup> discipline their body and make it their slave (1 Cor 9:9).<sup>39</sup> With this sense of urgency, Lin intends to give a

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<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 8.

<sup>36</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Fuhuo [Resurrection]* (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 35.

<sup>37</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Wuge Shenpan [Five Judgments]* (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 16.

<sup>38</sup> Lin, *Shang Fa*, 46-55.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 30-31.

warning to Christians and exhort them to live a holy life and work hard with great determination.

Relevant to his own experience, Lin understands suffering for Christ as a precious chance to gain eternal rewards in a higher level. To Lin, suffering for Christ is meaningful and precious—something highly valued by God as only those who endure suffering and gain victory will receive crown and reign with Christ (Rev 20:4), a superior form of reward.<sup>40</sup> Enduring suffering for Christ certainly requires the Christian's determination and perseverance. However, having experience of more than twenty years of imprisonment for his faith, Lin reminds Christians not to boast about themselves in their suffering. He attributes his endurance during imprisonment not to himself but to Christ, who heard his humble prayers and sustained and enabled him.<sup>41</sup> Here Lin emphasizes an attitude of humility, which ought to be acquired in the Christian's experience of suffering for Christ. Apart from a precious value given to suffering for Christ, Lin also explains suffering in a general sense. He understands that except for suffering caused by sin, all suffering is beneficial in a sense that God draws Christians closer to Him through suffering.<sup>42</sup> Suffering is therefore a chance for Christians to grow and receive rewards when they persevere and win the victory in their suffering. In particular, sufferings like poverty, disease, and emotional pain can be used by God to test, train, and build up Christians who may then receive more

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 22, 25-26.

<sup>41</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Shouku You Yi* [*Suffering is Beneficial*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 7. Cf. Anderson, 14.

<sup>42</sup> Lin, *Shouku*, 1, 13.



spiritual blessings in this life,<sup>43</sup> as well as rewards in eternity.<sup>44</sup> Taking in view these broad areas of suffering, Lin understands suffering as a common experience in the Christian's life. He understands that unlike the rule of the world, which is sweetness first and bitterness later, God's principle is sweetness coming after bitterness.<sup>45</sup> Lin thus urges that Christians should wish to endure excessive suffering and be faithful unto death so that they will have a more beautiful resurrected body (Heb 11:32-40).<sup>46</sup> In other words, they will receive more rewards in eternity. In view of the aforementioned description, Lin has a broad and positive understanding of suffering. This may have been shaped by biblical teachings, the example of Wang Mingdao, Lin's own experience as a wartime refugee, and his more than twenty-years of imprisonment. Lin was a particular case. Yet, in view of his common experience of suffering and oppression with some of his Protestant contemporaries, especially those of the house churches, Lin was a representative and his case spoke for many of them in socialist China.

The previous exploration indicates that Lin's emphases on the pious Christian life and rewards in eternity are closely related to each other. The pious Christian life is motivated by an expectation of eternal rewards, which are based on good deeds. Lin therefore exhorts the Christian to strive in life and work. Based on his perception of a sharp contrast between the Christian and the world, Lin's view of the pious Christian life is distinctively different from the ways of the world. Meanwhile, in

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<sup>43</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Qizhong Dejiu* [Seven Kinds of Salvation] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 10.

<sup>44</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Liu Lei Tongku* [Tearing and Crying] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2006), 28.

<sup>45</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Yi Shui Bian Jiu* [Water Turned into Wine] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2010), 19.

<sup>46</sup> Lin, *Fuhuo*, 36.

Lin's emphasis on the Christian's deliberate effort, he presents the Christian, as well as the church, as having a distinctive and independent existence in socialist China. In this sense, both Lin's view of the pious Christian life and eternal rewards contribute to the shape of his socio-political perspective.

### 3.2.3 Disengaging as Engaging

Lin's ideas of eternal rewards and the pious Christian life encourage Christians to witness for Christ in the world, which will lead to their impact upon the people and the world around them. Nevertheless, Lin does not discuss the way that Chinese culture or society change. He criticises moral corruption and unbiblical cultural practices and advises the Christian to simply avoid them. He does not seem burdened with changing the world or linking the gospel and culture or society. His focus is on keeping a pure Christian faith and conducting a Christian way of living in the world.

This attitude of Lin is also applied to politics when he emphatically states that Christians spread the Gospel and do not get involved in politics, nor do they promote the unification of politics and religion.<sup>47</sup> Lin insists that their only purpose is to declare the Gospel and to learn together how to live the Christian life.<sup>48</sup> In times of rising tension, Lin urged his staff to pray more, to teach the biblical teachings about living for the glory of God, and to avoid any reference to politics.<sup>49</sup> Lin also asked his church members not to struggle with the government whenever facing

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<sup>47</sup> Lin, *Yesu Jidu de Jiangsheng*, 7.

<sup>48</sup> Anderson, 9.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 62.

oppression, and he required them not to participate in the June 4<sup>th</sup> Tiananmen Square event in 1989.<sup>50</sup> When he was requested by police officials to register his church as a Three-Self church in 1994, Lin's answer was that registration would cause tight restrictions and prevent the expansion of church ministry. Instead of accepting restrictions, he would rather go to prison again or die as a martyr.<sup>51</sup> In 1998, Lin's answer to government officials was again firm as usual: 'As citizens, we obey the government. We did not participate in the June 4<sup>th</sup> parade, yet our faith is free, and we can only obey God.'<sup>52</sup> Thus, Lin held a view of separation between the church and the state. He consistently indicated that he and his church were not opposing the government, nor were they politically involved.<sup>53</sup> He submitted himself and his church to the government in civil matters while at the same time insisting upon obedience to God rather than man in matters of faith.

In between his submission to the government and obedience to God, Lin tried to defend the purity of the church as opposed to the so-called unbelief of modernists. Perhaps due to his upbringing in a time when church denominations were common in the West and in China, Macao and Hong Kong alike, Lin maintained a brotherly relationship with churches of various denominations like those of the Pentecostal and charismatic churches.<sup>54</sup> However, Lin pointed out that unity by coercion or unity with indifference were worse than forming a denomination with defects.<sup>55</sup>

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<sup>50</sup> Zheng, 117.

<sup>51</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Lin Xiangao Jianzheng Er* [*Testimony of Samuel Lamb Part 2*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 13.

<sup>52</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 7.

<sup>54</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Zongpai Yu Heyi* [*Denominations and Unity*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 25.

<sup>55</sup> *Ibid.*, 39.

Apparently, Lin was referencing the notion of ‘unity’ of Three-Self churches under the TSPM. In terms of his view towards the TSPM, Lin stood in line with Wang Mingdao. He endorsed Wang’s militant reaction against theological modernists.<sup>56</sup> In doing so, he also criticised ‘the party of the unbelievers’ (*bu xin pai*), a term first used by Wang as referring to modernists in the TSPM. Lin denounced ‘the party of the unbelievers,’ accusing them of being false pastors and false evangelists who propose a social gospel.<sup>57</sup> They use social transformation, social service, and ethics to disguise their unbelief.<sup>58</sup> In terms of faith, Lin said these unbelievers did not treasure the precious blood of Jesus and lured people into positivism and the prosperity gospel.<sup>59</sup> Seeing the unbelief and harmful effect of modernists on Christians, Lin urged them to leave the churches, namely, the Three-Self churches, which represent ‘the party of the unbelievers.’<sup>60</sup> He saw no common ground or possibility of working with modernists in the TSPM. Meanwhile, he was not reluctant to heavily criticise ‘the unbelievers,’ who by that time were the main leaders of the TSPM. In contrast to his avoidance of politics, Lin considered religious matters the ground on which he had to keep his stand.

While Lin appeared to avoid the politics of socialist China, he explicitly expressed interest in another kind of politics—the politics of the kingdom of heaven. Lin explained,

The Bible also includes ‘politics,’ though we as Christians do not promote the unification of politics and religion. We spread the Gospel but do not get

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<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 19.

<sup>57</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Fuyin* [*The Gospel*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 18.

<sup>58</sup> Lin, *Wuge Shenpan*, 13.

<sup>59</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Baoxue* [*Precious Blood*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 6, 28.

<sup>60</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Yitong Beiti* [*Being Raptured Together*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 54.

involved in politics. Yet we talk about the politics of the kingdom of heaven, which will take place when Jesus returns and we resurrect from the dead. We endure suffering even die for the Lord in this lifetime. But in the kingdom of heaven, we will reign together with Christ.<sup>61</sup>

That said, this kingdom politics is to be fulfilled in the world to come. However, that some Christians will reign with Christ results from the fact that these Christians suffer and even die for Christ in this world. Therefore, just as the promise of eternal rewards encourages a pious Christian life on earth, a great expectation for the politics of the world to come also inspires an active Christian life with deliberate effort in the present world. Lin explains further, ‘We become people of heaven after getting saved. We live in the world yet do not belong to it; we engage with the world (*ru shi*) yet transcend the world (*chao shi*); we transcend the world yet save the world (*jiu shi*).’<sup>62</sup> With this view, Christians are compelled to actively witness for Christ in the world. Although Lin went through severe oppression, he still expected the church to be a witness for Christ so that this witness might bring forth good for the nation and its people.<sup>63</sup> In the time period from the Summer of 1956 to early Autumn of 1957 when religious control was relatively loose, Christian lifestyles and value systems emerged as a silent witness in factories, offices, campuses, and marketplaces.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, massive Christian revivals and growing Christian influence from the 1980s have also been examples of this witness, and Lin’s church was undoubtedly one among many distinctive examples. Here Lin’s encouragement of an active attitude

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<sup>61</sup> Lin, *Yesu Jidu de Jiangsheng*, 7.

<sup>62</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Jidutu de Diwei* [*The Status of the Christian*] (Guangzhou: n.p., 2007), 13.

<sup>63</sup> During his imprisonment, Lin ‘became keenly sensitive to his nation and its people.’ Anderson, 111.

<sup>64</sup> *Ibid.*, 61.

and engagement with the world should be understood carefully. Bearing in mind his silence on social concern and avoidance of politics, his idea of ‘engaging with the world’ (*ru shi*) refers to witness for Christ in the world and its consequence of increasing the Christian population, instead of engaging or transforming the ways of the world. Lin realised the power of the gospel and its impact upon the world. But to him, this impact is about people’s conversion to Christ, the sanctification of the already converted and the growth of the church.

It is reasonable that Lin did not express any interest in changing society or engaging with political processes, since he held fast to a conservative theological position, was influenced by the fundamentalist pastor Wang Mingdao,<sup>65</sup> and went through harsh oppression. Lin submitted himself to the government in civil matters, but his loyalty to Christ’s lordship and insistence on Christian values and the independence of the church from the government led to his refusal towards the TSPM and non-cooperation with the CCP’s united front policy. At the same time, his emphasis on the pious Christian life and exhortation regarding eternal rewards urged Christians to bear strong witness for Christ in the world. This was intolerable to the CCP which therefore oppressed Lin and his church. It was inevitable that a political conflict between Lin and the political powers would emerge and linger. Lin intended

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<sup>65</sup> Wang Mingdao may have been understood by some as holding a view of ‘Christ and culture in paradox.’ However, Baiyu Andrew Song argues that Wang was in between the models of ‘two kingdoms’ and ‘transformationist,’ while leaning more towards the former. Song explains that Wang realised the total corruption of human nature and society. However, he also recognised the possibility of social reform and believed that individual conversion not only enabled but was also prior to social changes. Cf. Baiyu Andrew Song, ‘Christ Against Culture? A Re-evaluation of Wang Mingdao’s Popular Theology,’ *Journal of Global Christianity* 3, no. 1 (2017): 64. Cf. Wang Mingdao, ‘Yigong You Jige Fuyin Ne?’ [*How Many Gospels Are There?*], *Lingshi Jikan* [*Spiritual Food Quarterly*] 23, (1932): 2-12.

to avoid politics, yet his approach turned out to have political effects in socialist China. His way of seeming disengagement turned out to be a way of engaging the socio-political order.

### 3.2.4 Lin and Yoder

The previous section has explored and discussed Lin's socio-political views and how they were significantly shaped by his understanding of the pious Christian life and its corresponding eternal rewards. Yet, Lin did not intend to construct a political theology, nor did he try to systematically or comprehensively present a socio-political approach to the Christian faith in the Chinese context. Many people would simply apply H. Richard Niebuhr's classic 'Christ against culture' type upon Lin. However, Lin was more than just rejecting culture. His primary intent was to provide a strong motivation and clear guidelines for the Christian life in socialist China. While his exhortation and guidelines may have been helpful for the Christian's practice of faith, Lin did not provide much explanation or analysis, which may have helped to provide a comprehensive understanding of his socio-political approach. It is noted that Lin's theology is the least sophisticated compared to the other three case studies, which will be explored in the following chapters. Because of this situation, Lin's socio-political views will be explained and analysed further by using John Howard Yoder's book, *The Politics of Jesus*, as an external hermeneutical aid. While Lin tends to avoid talking about politics, they share a common disposition and engage similar themes. Reading Lin through the approach of Yoder helps reveal and elaborate Lin's views and approach to his socio-political context. Yoder's book

will help clarify and draw out the theological trajectory of how Lin's views can be understood.

Based on his substantial analyses of the scriptures, Yoder asserts that Jesus' ministry on earth was socio-political—that Jesus intended to set up a new social order, which introduces servanthood, rather than spirituality, as an alternative to accepted patterns of leadership.<sup>66</sup> Besides servant leadership, Jesus consistently claimed and made real a new pattern of presence in the world through his ministry, life and death.<sup>67</sup> In so doing, Jesus brought about practicable ethical instruction featuring 'a new possibility of human, social, and therefore political relationships.'<sup>68</sup> Accordingly, his disciples were called to form a new kind of community, in which living a radically new kind of life became possible.<sup>69</sup>

While understanding Jesus as having a socio-political intent, Yoder also views Jesus' 'ethic of the cross' as a way of subordination. Jesus' way of subordination is seen from his compliance with Roman law and Jewish authorities. When facing accusation and the threat of death, he chose to accept the cross, rather than calling for revolt, to fulfil his destiny: accomplishing salvation for humankind. Yet in this acceptance of subordination, Jesus kept his message and refused to support the powers of the world. In so doing, he was 'so morally independent of their pretensions' that he became a threat to their dominion.<sup>70</sup> Thus, the cross of Calvary,

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<sup>66</sup> John Howard Yoder, *The Politics of Jesus* (Grand Rapids: William B. Eerdmans Publishing Company; Carlisle: The Paternoster Press, 1994), 38-39.

<sup>67</sup> *Ibid.*, 93.

<sup>68</sup> *Ibid.*, 52.

<sup>69</sup> *Ibid.*, 53.

<sup>70</sup> *Ibid.*, 145.



namely, Jesus' crucifixion, became 'the political, legally-to-be-expected result of a moral clash with the powers ruling his society.'<sup>71</sup> Jesus thus set the example of subordination. Yet, as the master, Jesus' disciples followed his pattern of subordination. Yoder explains:

The disciples choose not to exercise certain types of power because, in a given context, the rebellion of the structure of a given particular power is so incorrigible that at the time the most effective way to take responsibility is to refuse to collaborate, and by that refusal to take sides in favor of the victims whom that power is oppressing. This refusal is not a withdrawal from society. It is rather a major negative intervention within the process of social change, a refusal to use unworthy means even for what seems to be a worthy end.<sup>72</sup>

In other words, the disciples' subordination, accompanied by refusal to collaborate, was a major intervention towards the socio-political context. Accordingly, Yoder interprets this subordination as the exercising, rather than the giving up, of one's freedom because freedom already becomes real when the Christian voluntarily accepts subordination.<sup>73</sup> Yoder also understands Jesus' subordination as bringing victory—it was on the cross that Jesus accomplished his mission. In this sense, the church's willingness to suffer is a participation in God's victorious patience with the rebellious powers of the world.<sup>74</sup> Through its existence in subordination, the church proclaims the lordship and victory of Christ and in doing so presents itself as a socio-political reality in the world.

Yoder intends to underline that the victory of Jesus is socio-political, here and now. Nevertheless, he explains that this victory has been understood as also

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<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 129.

<sup>72</sup> Ibid., 154.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 209.

eternal because in the worldview of the 1<sup>st</sup> century church, there was no fundamental gap between the present world and the eschatological promise. Since what the Christians were doing was precisely what led to where they were going, the future ‘other world’ was further ahead of them in the same direction in which they were already being led.<sup>75</sup> In light of this, the here and now politics of Jesus is not cut off from the politics of the coming world, but is a part and early phase of the continuous process of fulfilment of the coming kingdom.

Compared to Lin’s basic socio-political ideas presented in plain language and simple statements, Yoder has developed a relatively sophisticated understanding of the politics of Jesus. That said, several points of comparison between Yoder and Lin will help to better understand Lin’s socio-political approach. The first point is that they both accept the status of subordination. Yoder explains that Jesus constantly faced the temptation to utilise the immediately available violent methods to achieve the purposes of establishing the kingdom of heaven on earth.<sup>76</sup> This temptation was real because no government is divinely ordained: ‘A given government is not mandated or saved or made a channel of the will of God; it is simply lined up, used by God in the ordering of the cosmos.’<sup>77</sup> However, Jesus chose to accept subordination and went to the cross, on which he brought about the victory of God in human history. Unlike Jesus who declined the option of violence, Lin did not have any chances of using violent means against the Communist regime. However, it was

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<sup>75</sup> Ibid., 241.

<sup>76</sup> Ibid., 46-48, 57, 96.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 202.

also Lin's own choice to accept subordination. This can be seen from his requiring of church members not to participate in the student democratic movement in the summer of 1989, which was considered by many Chinese as a good chance for political protest and reform. Lin's consistent avoidance of making any reference to politics may reflect the restricted socio-political situation. However, his avoidance was not caused by fear, as he highly valued suffering for Christ and did not deny Christ once during his imprisonment. Lin submitted himself to the government in civil matters, endured oppression for his faith, and admonished Christians not to struggle with people who try to destroy the church.<sup>78</sup> He therefore genuinely accepted the status of subordination for himself and for his church.

The second point of comparison between Yoder and Lin is that they both emphasise letting the church be the church, a distinctive community witnessing for Christ in the world. Yoder understands that it is in the way of subordination that the church becomes a distinct community in which members live out a radically new way of life in the world. Similarly, Lin emphasises the pious Christian life as distinctively different from the life of the world. This pious Christian life requires Christians' deliberate effort, and therefore features a dynamic community life. Like Yoder's view that the church by its existence constantly witnesses for Christ and proclaims his victory over the world, Lin's primary concern is the church. As long as the church is being the church, fully and freely functioning in accordance with biblical teachings, Lin is not concerned about how the world may change, for he

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<sup>78</sup> Lin Xiangao, *Dezui Shengling de Zui* [*The Sin That Offends the Holy Spirit*] (Guangzhou, n.p. 2012), 10.

perceives a sharp contrast between the Christian and the world. In the situation of intense pressure from the political powers, Lin chose to uphold the lordship of Christ and protect the independence of the church. Although he insisted on not struggling with the oppressors of the church, he refused to cooperate with the TSPM since this would violate the lordship of Christ and the existence and expansion of the church, thereby jeopardising a genuine Christian life. Lin understands that when Christians live a genuine Christian life and the church, as a community functions properly, they will be able to bear witness for Christ.

The third point of comparison between Yoder and Lin is that they both realise the connection between this world and the world to come. Yoder elaborates upon the continuity between the two worlds, seeing this world and the world to come as being along the same historical timeline. The politics of Jesus connects the two worlds through his life, death and resurrection. Lin does not argue for Jesus' life and ministry as substantially political, or politically significant, yet he does claim the politics of the kingdom of heaven, in which the Christian's eternal rewards will be measured by his or her life and work in this world. Bearing in mind this connection between the two worlds, Lin does not portray a vivid picture of the same line or direction between them. This is perhaps because he was expecting radical and glorious change to take place when Christ returns. To Lin and many of his Chinese contemporaries, such change means a complete release from their suffering on earth. However, different than those same contemporaries, Lin's higher expectation was rewards rather than merely release. Release is for every Christian, but rewards are dependent upon each Christian individual's deeds. Lin clearly presents the causality

between the Christian life and eternal rewards. This causality provides a substantial rationale for striving toward the pious Christian life on earth, which in turn enhances Lin's perception of the connection between the two worlds.

The fourth point of comparison is that for both Yoder and Lin, disengaging is, or becomes, a way of engaging. Yoder interprets Jesus' choice of subordination and refusal of taking the way of the world as a way of political engagement, which may be seen as a disengagement from a perspective of the world. However, this seeming disengagement ironically turned out to be a revolutionary engagement, especially as it brought about the victory of God into human history.<sup>79</sup> Unlike Yoder who is free to discuss the politics of Jesus, Lin tried to avoid commenting on politics in a Communist context. He did not argue for the political rights of the church, nor did he look for a way to fight the ruling powers. However, though being subordinated to civil authorities, Lin believed that the church was commissioned to bear witness for Christ even in a socialist country, and for that reason he refused to register his church under the TSPM. When the CCP coercively propagandised Communism as the sole state ideology, the independent act of holding fast to any other ideology or religion, including Christianity, became a political stance. This explains why the charges against Lin, namely being 'counter-revolutionary, anti-Soviet Union, pro-imperialist, and an underling of Wang Mingdao,' were political in nature. Lin's refutation towards the TSPM was interpreted by the governing authority as a 'crime' since it was perceived as a threat to the Communist regime.

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<sup>79</sup> Yoder calls Jesus' subordination as a 'revolutionary subordination' in the sense that it brought a new world order that concurrently existed with the old order. Yoder, 162, 186.

His subordination to the government in civil matters yet independence in faith turned out to be, in Yoder's term, 'revolutionary.' Lin realised that he was oppressed because of his non-cooperation towards the government's religious policy. However, he treasured a genuine Christian life and the free witness of the church. In keeping the independence of the church and refusing the TSPM, Lin consciously chose a way of socio-political engagement in socialist China.

The above exploration of Yoder's understanding of the politics of Jesus and comparison between Lin and Yoder provide a better understanding of Lin's socio-political approach, in which he accepts subordination in civil matters, emphasises the independent existence of the church, and encourages the Christian's effort to pursue the pious Christian life and rewards in eternity. In various aspects, Lin's view shares commonality with Yoder's understanding of the politics of Jesus, and his approach towards the socio-political context is clearly disengagement as engagement. In this sense, Yoder's understanding has shed light in the present study of Lin's socio-political approach.

However, it should be noted that the 'politics of Jesus,' as understood and explained by Yoder, is not plainly recorded in Jesus' or his disciples' statements in the New Testament. Yoder's point is not to explore the political aspect, as one among many aspects of Jesus' teaching, or to explore whatever can be defined as politics in Jesus' life, death and ministry. Instead, Yoder's argument is that Jesus' life, death and resurrection are primarily political in the sense that they have brought a new social order to this world. Yoder understands the political nature of Jesus' life as not only a fact but also Jesus' intent. Indeed, there will always be something of

politics as long as humans are living and interacting with one another. Whatever happens in or to the church is always something political in human society.

However, a new social order, or politics, is just an outward aspect or result of Jesus' ministry. This outward effect is a consequence of people's conversion, which is firstly an inner experience of human individuals. In the context of servanthood versus spirituality, Yoder does not explain why Jesus' intent and preference is the former and not the latter since Jesus also emphasises repentance, forgiveness of sin, and himself as the way, the truth and the life. There is no evidence that Jesus held servanthood as more important than spirituality, or a new social order as a superior concern over personal repentance.

The presence of politics, or the teaching on servanthood, in Jesus' life, death and resurrection, however important it may be, does not necessarily downplay the value of spirituality, which is of great concern to Jesus. To the contrary, the exercise of servanthood, or the realisation of Jesus' politics, somehow relies on the condition of the Christian's spirituality. While the Christian's spirituality may include various aspects, an inner strength and personal devotion certainly play a significant role.

When the Christian is weak in his or her spirituality, namely, lacking spiritual strength or personal devotion, it is unlikely that he or she can effectively exercise servanthood based on Jesus' servant-leadership model. When Christians are not able to exercise servanthood well, they are unlikely to bring forth a new social order after the model of Jesus. Servanthood is of great importance to Jesus. Yet it is not the whole picture, nor necessarily the primary concern of Jesus. Yoder emphasises Jesus' teaching on servanthood and captures the politics of Jesus. However,

considering Jesus' emphases on various areas, including spirituality, it is inappropriate to view Jesus' life, death and resurrection as primarily political.

Yoder's view has helped to shed light in understanding Lin's socio-political approach. It can be argued that Lin's approach is biblically sound in the sense that it shares various significant aspects of Jesus' politics as understood by Yoder. Nevertheless, Yoder's understanding is inadequate to describe Lin's thought, considering the inadequacy of Yoder's own view and the fact that Lin has rather been a particular case in socialist China. In view of this, Lin's socio-political approach still needs to be explained in his overall theology and understood in his context.

### 3.3 Evaluation

Lin's ministry ceased during his imprisonment, yet his large congregation was allowed to continue from the 1980s until it was banned in 2018, five years after his death. There are two reasons for the change in attitude and action by the state's allow for Lin's church's long existence. Firstly, started from the 1980s, the state turned its primary interest to economic development and 'four modernisations,' rendering religious tension secondary.<sup>80</sup> Secondly, as Lin became well-known both inside and outside China, the state might intend to make use of him and his church as an example to claim freedom of religious belief in China.<sup>81</sup> However, a relatively lenient policy did not change Lin's theology and his socio-political approach.

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<sup>80</sup> Fulton, 48.

<sup>81</sup> Bishop Ding Guangxun, one of the founders and for many years leader of the TSPM, was reported to have said, 'As long as Samuel Lamb is free to preach in Guangzhou, we know there is freedom for Christians in all of China.' Cf. Anderson, 163.



Throughout Lin's life and ministry, he constantly kept his theological concerns on the pious Christian life and eternal rewards and his disengagement from the socio-political context.

There may have been three major reasons which caused Lin to remain constant in his theology and approach. The first reason was an influence from fundamentalism through Wang Mingdao and Lin's own Evangelical stand. As a junior associate of Wang, Lin supported Wang's criticism against modernists and the TSPM. After the Cultural Revolution, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy continued to have influence on Lin. Accordingly, he indicated no interest in modernising Christianity, a major concern of some Christians prior to 1949, in order to cope with modernism. Meanwhile, Lin seemed to present himself as an Evangelical instead of a fundamentalist. His broad exposure to different churches and denominations before 1949 and his ministry and writing in a post-Cultural Revolution era contributed to his preference for being an Evangelical. Yet, a continuous influence from Wang and Lin's own suffering of a twenty-year imprisonment contributed to his firm reaction against modernists and the TSPM.

The second reason is that Lin insisted on the separation of church and state. As a long-standing Protestant tradition, the view of church-state separation may have been a lesson learning from the negative example of the integration of church and state practiced by the Roman Catholic Church during the Middle Ages. In Lin's case, his insistence on church-state separation was rather based on a concern for the independence of the church in socialist China, in which the CCP demands allegiance and leadership, even control, in almost all areas of social life. In this context, any

independent existence, including religion, thought or organisation, would be considered a challenge or even a threat to the CCP. Lin's insistence on the church's independence in socialist China corresponds Yoder's idea that the church's independent existence is a political reality, which presents serious challenge even threat to the powers of the world. Although Lin's church was allowed to continue after the 1980s, he and his church faced harassment from time to time. While church-state separation does not necessarily lead to an attitude of silence, Lin's silence and so-called non-involvement in politics made sense in a context of religious repression. Lin's submission to the government in civil matters may be understood as a gesture of respect towards civil authorities, but it may also have been an expression of Lin's claim of church-state separation: while he respected government authorities in civil matters, the latter should in turn respect his religious conscience and practice. Lin's submission in civil matters and insistence on 'obey God rather than man' clearly reflect Yoder's idea of 'revolutionary subordination.' When the modernist-led TSPM worked hand in hand with the CCP or the government, Lin found no other way to follow his conscience but to firmly reject the TSPM and refuse to cooperate with the CCP's religious policy. When this happened, he indicated no concern for the socialist cause in China, which was then the continuous focus of China's move towards modernisation.

The third reason Lin remained constant in his stand is that Lin considered the Christian's deliberate effort as critical to the pursuit of the pious Christian life and contributing to eternal rewards. As the Christian's effort is critical, pursuit of the pious Christian life and eternal rewards requires a whole-hearted and long-lasting

commitment. Lin's admonishing of avoidance of unbiblical cultural practices indicated an indifferent attitude and kept himself from bothering with cultural issues. Meanwhile, he kept silence on politics and gave exhortation on eternal rewards and the pious Christian life his full attention and energy. Lin's focus on the Christian's consistent holy life points to the Christian's deliberate effort, which is understood by Lin as the basic measurement contributing to one's eternal rewards. Yoder's idea of servanthood requires an active exercise of the Christian faith in relation to other people. Lin's exhortation regarding eternal rewards demands deliberate effort in the pious Christian life. Although Yoder points to servanthood and Lin seeks eternal rewards, they both consider the Christian's effort playing a crucial role. Interestingly, Lin's exhortation encouraged, even compelled, a distinctive Christian life in an independent church. It would then bring about a strong Christian witness in socialist China. From Yoder's perspective, a strong Christian witness is a political existence in the world.

Lin's socio-political approach is therefore like that of Jesus, as explained by Yoder, in a sense of disengagement as engagement. Yet, Lin's approach was generated from his conservative Evangelicalism in a socialist context, with a continuous influence of the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, and it featured Lin's own dominant theological concerns on the pious Christian life and eternal rewards. Lin did not plan on an approach of disengagement as engagement. His focus was rather an exercise of a privatised faith in socialist China. However, this exercise of faith and disengagement from the context turned out to be a radical

engagement with the context. In other words, Lin's exercise of a privatised faith became a radical response to the political powers in socialist China.

### 3.4 Conclusion

As a prominent and productive Protestant figure after the 1980s, Lin in his theological thinking was significantly shaped by several major factors, such as his association with Wang Mingdao, his more than twenty-year imprisonment, and his surrounding Communist context. Lin's appeal for the pious Christian life was inspired by an expectation of eternal rewards, which also brought him comfort and encouragement in times of oppression and suffering. Meanwhile, Lin's understanding of the pious Christian life was also influenced by his perception of a distinct contrast between the Christian and the world. This distinct contrast, instead of leading to escapism, encouraged a distinctive Christian life in which the Christian witnesses for Christ in the world. Lin understood that both the pious Christian life and eternal rewards require and encourage the Christian's deliberate effort. Lin's Christian approach is therefore certainly active, yet in a way different from the ways of the world.

These are also what shape Lin's socio-political approach. Striving for the pious Christian life and refusing the ways of the world naturally comes together for Lin. On the one hand, he insisted on the pious Christian life and the independence of the church. On the other hand, he rejected modernists and the TSPM, and he refused to cooperate with the government when it came to their terms for religious life. Lin's submission in civil matters and silence on society and politics all made him appear as

if he was completely disengaged from these matters. However, this is just one side of Lin's approach. On the other side, Lin's strong appeal for the pious Christian life and an independent Christian community presents the church as a distinct socio-political existence. When both sides work together in socialist China, Lin's approach is a rather radical form of socio-political engagement.

#### IV. WANG WEIFAN'S ASPIRATION TO A CHINESE CHRISTIANITY

This chapter will discuss the theology of Wang Weifan, a Three-Self church counterpart of Lin Xiangao. Unlike Lin who practices a privatised faith and adopts a way of socio-political disengagement, which turns out to be a way of radical engagement, Wang proposes a broad concept of a Chinese Christianity (*zhongguo jidujiao*) and carries out active socio-political engagement. Holding a historical view in favour of socialist China, Wang supports the path of the TSPM and suggests the realisation of a unified Chinese church. Meanwhile, with a passion towards traditional Chinese culture (*zhongguo chuantong wenhua*) and a high regard of its role in Chinese theology, Wang proposes a Chinese theology integrated with Chinese culture. With these two emphases – a unified Chinese church and a Chinese theology integrated with Chinese culture – Wang aspires to a Chinese Christianity. While this aspiration tends to embrace the historical, social and cultural contexts in China, Wang observes an interactive relationship between the church and the state, as well as between the church and society. Wang then actively engages with the socio-political context in various aspects. Thus, in his broad socio-political engagement, Wang draws a great impetus from his idea of a Chinese Christianity, in which his passion for Chinese culture plays a significant role. In other words, Wang's socio-political engagement is significantly driven by his cultural aspiration to a Chinese Christianity.

#### 4.1 Profile of Wang Weifan

Wang Weifan was born in Taizhou, Jiangsu province in 1927. He was brought up in a big traditional Chinese family, in which his father's and uncle's families lived as one family together. Beginning in his early school years, Wang received a traditional Confucian education, influenced by the Buddhist beliefs of his mother and aunt, and encountered the influence of the New Culture Movement which started in 1915. Wang was born in a time of social turmoil. His father died when he was seven, and his mother died when he was seventeen. His family situation therefore declined rapidly and affected his education. He was enrolled in Shanghai Jiaotong University in 1946, but he soon dropped out of school due to various difficulties. He was later enrolled in National Central University (*Guoli Zhongyang Daxue*) in 1948. However, his conversion to Christianity and the university's discrimination against Christians caused him to leave the university and go to study at the Hangzhou China Theological Seminary (HCTS, *Hangzhou Zhongguo Shenxueyuan*), which was established and managed by the CIM. Later, when the HCTS was incorporated into the NUTS, Wang moved to the latter and graduated in 1955. Immediately after his graduation, Wang went to serve as the pastor of a small church in Zhenjiang, Jiangsu province for about two years. From 1957 to 1958, Wang worked as the editor of the journal *Sheng Guang* (*Holy Light*). During the Anti-Rightist Movement and later the Cultural Revolution, Wang was attacked as a rightist and forced to work in villages and factories for eight years. In 1979, Wang started working in the Religious Research Institute of Nanjing University. When the

NUTS was reopened in 1981, Wang was employed to work in the seminary as professor, academic dean, and publishing editor until he retired in 1999.<sup>1</sup>

Wang was identified, also self-identified, as an Evangelical since his early years of conversion. From 1949 to 1951, as a young Christian, Wang's faith grew through participation in a Bible study group conducted by Jia Yuming and attendance at the Huang Ni Gang church (Nanjing), which was pastored by Yang Shaotang. Both Evangelicals, Jia and Yang significantly shaped Wang's Evangelical faith and spirituality.<sup>2</sup> Later on, Wang was also influenced by the more progressive Christians such as Xie Fuya and Zhao Zichen. Yet, these figures' influence on Wang was basically in the fields of Chinese culture and social concern. With regard to his Evangelical faith, Kevin Xiyi Yao explains that although Wang tried to adapt to the socialist China and worked within the TSPM system, he constantly held to Evangelical foundation in his theological reflection. Despite his passion to integrate Chinese theology and culture, Wang kept his Evangelical stand and did not hesitate to point out the boundaries of influence that Chinese culture should have on theology.<sup>3</sup> Wang's Evangelical credentials have been therefore widely recognised. As an Evangelical in the TSPM system and a professor at the NUTS, Wang was widely welcomed by many Christians in Three-Self churches.

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<sup>1</sup> For further biographical details of Wang Weifan, see Yao and Song, 359-64. See also Yuan, *Shengsheng Shenxue*.

<sup>2</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Shengling de Huohua' [the Spark of the Holy Spirit], in *Zi Mu [Self Pastoring]* (Nanjing: NUTS, 2010), 126. Quoted in Bao, 'Wang Weifan Lingxiu Tezhi Yanjiu' [Study on Wang Weifan's Trait of Spiritual Formation], in Yao and Song, 248.

<sup>3</sup> Yao, 'Wang Weifan de Fuyin Zhuyi Sixiang,' 3-26.



## 4.2 Wang's Theology

As an Evangelical pastor, professor, theologian, theological educator and a productive writer, Wang's theology is demonstrated through his writings, which have been widely read among those in the TSPM. Wang published nearly two hundred articles and sermons, and about twenty songs and poems. Besides this, he published around twenty books, including books on theology like *Jiben Yaodao* (*Basic Doctrines*) and *Zhongguo Shenxue Ji Qi Wenhua Yuanyuan* (*Chinese Theology and Its Cultural Origins*), biblical exegesis like *Shengyan de Quanshi* (*Exegesis of the Holy Words*), *Putong Shuxin Shiyi* (*Exegesis of the General Epistles*), and *Liweiji Zhushi* (*Exegesis of Leviticus*). He also authored devotional writings like *Yedi Li de Baihehua* (*Lilies of the Field: Meditations for the Church Year*), *Shijia Lupang de Xishui* (*Stream besides the Road of the Cross*), and *Moxiang Ji* (*Collection of Meditations*). Wang's sermon collections include *Guitu Ji* (*Collection of Homeward Journey*) and *Women You Yi Jitan* (*We Have An Altar*). Wang's writings therefore touched various fields. The present study will focus on relevant writings to examine Wang's idea of a unified Chinese church, Chinese culture's role in a Chinese theology, and his view on the relationship between the church and the state, and between the church and the society.

### 4.2.1 A Unified Chinese Church

As a supporter of the TSPM from its outset, Wang has in view a unified Chinese church in the sense that Protestants should follow the path of the TSPM and move towards unification of the Chinese church. This idea can be observed from Wang's support of the TSPM in the 1950s, his historical reflection in the 1980s, and his proposal of a single and unified Chinese church in the 1990s.

### Supporting the TSPM in the 1950s

Wang was among the Evangelicals who joined the TSPM in the 1950s. It was noted earlier that Evangelicals might have various concerns while joining the TSPM. Yet, Wang seemed convinced that he should support the TSPM and the Communist regime from their beginning. In early years of the 1950s, when a patriotic and anti-imperialist movement took place in China, Wang, by then the president of the student union of HCTS, played an active role. He published several articles in *Tian Feng* to support the Communist regime and criticise against imperialism and feudalism. He confessed that the students of HCTS were dominated by imperialism in their thought and had walked in a reactionary direction. Under the nation-wide Thought Reform Movement, they had come to realise the thought poison of imperialism.<sup>4</sup> Thought reform was therefore necessary for them, otherwise they would be weeded out by this age.<sup>5</sup> Wang commented that the Thought Reform Movement and the Three-Self Patriotic Movement helped seminary students to realise their dark past linked with imperialism and feudalism. In addition, both movements brought them new light and liberation.<sup>6</sup>

In the mid-1950s, when Wang Mingdao refused to register his church with the TSPM and criticised its leaders as modernists and the ‘party of the unbelievers,’ Wang Weifan wrote to support the TSPM and its leaders. He testified that during his study in the NUTS, he did not find any so-called ‘party of the unbelievers.’ He insisted that those labelled as ‘the party of the unbelievers’ also had the life of Christ,

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<sup>4</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Gexin Hou de Zhongguo Shenxueyuan’ [The China Theological Seminary after Reform] *Tian Feng* [Heavenly Wind], no. 299 (26 January 1952): 12.

<sup>5</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Women de Hanjia Shenghuo (Shang)’ [Our Life during the Winter Vacation 1], *Tian Feng* [Heavenly Wind], no. 8 (1952): 6.

<sup>6</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Women de Hanjia Shenghuo (Xia)’ [Our Life during the Winter Vacation 2], *Tian Feng* [Heavenly Wind], no. 9 (1952): 7.

but they were separated due to a man-made rift. The differences between various Christian traditions were just minor differences. Therefore, there was no such thing as ‘the party of the unbelievers.’<sup>7</sup> By saying so, Wang seemed to abandon the fundamentalist-modernist controversy, which started in the 1920s and continued to be held by house church figures like Wang Mingdao and Lin Xiangao in the 1950s and even after the 1980s. Wang Weifan claimed that Wang Mingdao’s criticism against the NUTS was subjective imagination, and predicted his mistaken criticism would be abandoned by patriotic believers.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, as a young pastor in the mid-1950s, Wang clearly indicated his support towards the TSPM.

### Historical Reflection in the 1980s

In the 1980s, when the Reform and Opening Up policy resulted in a relatively open and lenient context, the TSPM restarted its function and many Three-Self churches were reopened. Wang reflects retrospectively on China’s modern history by expressing a negative view towards Western missions and the Chinese church before 1949. He considers that Western missionaries came to China in the wrong times and used the wrong ways to stay. They came during times of military invasions by Western powers and were protected by unequal treaties. He comments that these drew the Chinese church into a historical tragedy from the date of its birth.<sup>9</sup> Wang explains further that before 1949, when the Chinese people were fighting for freedom and independence, the Chinese church was closely associated with, even

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<sup>7</sup> Wang, ‘Women Sui Duo,’ 5.

<sup>8</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Shi Weile Xinyang Me?’ [Is It Really for Faith?], *Tian Feng* [Heavenly Wind], no. 7 (1955): 15.

<sup>9</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘1949 Nian Qian de Zhongguo Jiaohui’ [The Chinese Church before 1949], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang: Wang Weifan Wenji (1979-1998)* [In the Wilderness for Two Decades: Selected Works of Wang Weifan (1979-1998)] (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, [1986] 2011), 429.

attached to, Western missionaries and therefore stood opposing the Chinese people. Reflecting on some concrete stories, Wang laments that when the Chinese people ‘sang a dirge,’ the Chinese Christians ‘did not mourn.’<sup>10</sup> While a high priest must be like his brothers in every respect, the Chinese church in her indifferent attitude was incompatible to her own brothers, namely, the Chinese people.<sup>11</sup>

Concerning the 1950s, Wang keeps the same train of thought, and he tries to justify the path of the TSPM. He states that the Chinese church was able to ‘wake up from death (*si er fusu*)’ in the middle of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.<sup>12</sup> Obviously to Wang, what made the Chinese church wake up from death was the TSPM, a path of patriotism, an independence from Western churches and missions, and a sharing of the same interest and experience with the Chinese people. Apparently, this idea of Wang clearly echoes a major concern of paternalism among some of the Chinese Christians in the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. Wang therefore indicates that the PRC and the TSPM definitively solve the Chinese Christian’s concern of paternalism.

Regarding the post-Cultural Revolution era, Wang describes a theological shift taking place in the 1980s, a shift from finding Christ only in a ‘secret chamber’ (Song 4:12) in the midst of the wretchedness and fickleness of the old world to finding the world as ‘the garden of Christ.’ Wang explains that since this theological

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<sup>10</sup> Wang gives concrete examples. When the Eight-Nation Alliance sacked Beijing in 1900, a few missionaries were armed and guided the invaders. After China won the anti-Japanese war in 1945, Western missionary societies returned to China and regained control over church finances and administration. Some missionaries then spread anti-Communist speech and caused some Chinese Christians to hold doubt and even hostility towards the Chinese people’s revolution and the liberation war. Wang Weifan, ‘Zhongguo Jidujiao Sishi Nian’ [Forty Years of Chinese Christianity], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1990), 482.

<sup>11</sup> Wang, ‘1949 Nian Qian de,’ 430.

<sup>12</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Na Tianshang Fei Lai De Qingfeng’ [The Cool Breeze Blowing from The Heavens], in *Shi Nian Juju: Wang Weifan Wenji (1997-2007)* [Walking Lonely for Ten Years: Selected Works of Wang Weifan (1997-2007)] (Hong Kong: Christian Study Centre on Chinese Religion and Culture, [1998] 2009), 446-47.

shift, the Chinese Christians not only pursue purity and holiness but also love the flowers and the people in the garden of Christ.<sup>13</sup> Here Wang seems to suggest that this theological shift brings a new perspective for Chinese Christians. Wang then reflects on the suffering endured by both the Christians and non-Christian Chinese people during the Anti-Rightist Movement and the Cultural Revolution in the previous decades. His interpretation is that like Christ's suffering is for the people, the Chinese Christians' suffering in the past three decades has also been with the Chinese people and for the Chinese people. Wang also draws inspiration from Jewish prophets and priests, serving and praying to God on behalf of their nation and people. He explains that the Chinese Christians have shared with the Chinese people the same experience and suffering in the past three decades, therefore serving as priests before God for China and its people. This suffering is strikingly different from the suffering in the old world, in which most Chinese Christians did not bear the Chinese people's sufferings.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Wang insists that any ideas and practices that separate pastoral ministry from the path of the TSPM fall short of the tradition of God's calling and using prophets and apostles.<sup>15</sup>

Wang is aware of the TSPM as a Protestant response towards the CCP's religious policy, and he observes a tight relationship between the TSPM and the Communist regime. He perceives some foreign churches, which 'smuggle' Bibles and religious books into mainland China, as foreign anti-China forces which try to utilise religion to penetrate China by cultivating within the Chinese church an

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<sup>13</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Zhongguo Jiaohui de Mouxie Shenxue Bianqian' [Changes in Theological Thinking in the Church in China], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1985), 5-6.

<sup>14</sup> *Ibid.*, 7-8.

<sup>15</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Mantan Zichuan' [On Self-propagating], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1983), 414-15.

opposition party that opposes three-self principles, the CCP and the socialist system.<sup>16</sup> 'If their plots prevail, the colour of Chinese Christianity will be changed, and China's socialist system will be threatened.'<sup>17</sup> 'Colour change' is the typical terminology of the CCP as it claims socialist China as 'red.' In applying this term to Chinese Christianity, and indicating its sharing of the same fate with China's socialist system, Wang implies his firm support towards the TSPM and the Communist regime.

Wang's view of Chinese Christianity's sharing the same fate with China's socialist system is uncommon among Evangelicals, even with those who join the TSPM. Perhaps his idea on the destiny of human history can help to explain his uncommon view. Based on Hebrews 12:2, Wang understands Christ as the author and finisher of human history.<sup>18</sup> Wang also expresses an idea of a cosmic Christ.<sup>19</sup> While Bishop Ding Guangxun directly employs the term 'the cosmic Christ' (*yuzhou de jidu*) in his formal speech,<sup>20</sup> Wang states that Christ is not only the Lord of Christians but also 'the Lord of the cosmos and the Lord of history' (*yuzhou zhi zhu he lishi zhi zhu*).<sup>21</sup> This idea of Wang implies that Christ is in control of the universe and human history, and he will bring human history to a good ending according to

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<sup>16</sup> Wang affirms that inside China there is a few counter/bad elements (*fan/huai fenzi*) that try to use religions to conduct illegal and counter-revolutionary activities. Wang Weifan, 'Tan Xianfa Xiugai Caoan Di Sanshiwu Tiao' [On Article 35 of Draft Amendment to the Constitution], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1982), 201.

<sup>17</sup> Wang, 'Jidujiao Sishi Nian,' 494.

<sup>18</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Zhongguo Jiaohui de Shengjing Guan' [The Chinese Church's View of the Bible] in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1980s), 457.

<sup>19</sup> Alexander Chow understands Wang's idea of cosmic Christ as an extension of his understanding of an ever-generating God (*shengsheng shen* or *changsheng shen*). Chow, 'Wang Weifan's Cosmic Christ,' 387.

<sup>20</sup> Ding Guangxun, 'Yuzhou de Jidu' [The Cosmic Christ], in *Ding Guangxun Wenji* [Collected Works of Ding Guangxun] (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 1998), 90-99. This was Ding's speech delivered during the Friends of the Church in China conference in the United Kingdom in July of 1991.

<sup>21</sup> Wang, 'Mouxie Shenxue Bianqian,' 5-6.

his will. While this provides a general theological background, Wang's interpretation of 1 John 5:19 brings specific implications. When Wang interprets 'the whole world lies in the power of the evil one' in 1 John 5:19 as referring to the Apostle John's own historical context, he explains that the world does not always lie in the power of the evil one as Christ is the Lord of the human history. As it is so, Wang recommends, 'Christians should support those rulers who are in power with righteousness, and a society in which justice and righteousness take the upper hand, whether they know God or not.'<sup>22</sup> This statement suggests that, in the 1980s and the 1990s, Wang considered the CCP to be a righteous ruling body and socialist China a righteous society. Based on these understandings, Wang implies that Christians should support the Communist regime, and the TSPM is Protestants' right response towards the CCP's religious policy.

Wang's observation of China's history in the 19<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup> century, based on concrete examples, may not describe the whole picture. His interpretation of those examples may have been personal, and some of the ideas and terms have been taught by the CCP. Nevertheless, his view on modern China history, which is influenced by a concern for paternalism, significantly shapes his support towards the TSPM and the Communist regime.

### A Single and Unified Chinese Church

Wang's historical reflection reveals his firm support towards the TSPM and the Communist regime. However, in the midst of his adaptation to socialist China, Wang was also concerned about a healthy development of the church. With an

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<sup>22</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Chuantong Luoji Xingshi yu Shengjing Shenxue Fanchou' [Traditional Logic Form and Biblical Theological Domain], in *Shi Nian Juju* (1998), 126.

Evangelical faith, Wang's support of the TSPM does not mean he sees no flaw in it. This became obvious when deeper political and economic reforms were in demand in the late 1980s. Like house church pastor Lin Xiangao, Wang also insists on Christ being the head of the church. Yet, viewing from inside of the TSPM system, Wang criticises the Three-Self organisations, namely, the TSPM on various levels, for inappropriately placing themselves above the church and mistakenly taking church leadership. Wang explains that, historically, both the collapse of denominational systems in the 1950s and the socialist China's highly centralised political system have resulted in the inappropriate leadership of the TSPM, which has imposed on the church a serious government administration feature. However, this abnormal church administrative system cannot be explained by church doctrine, and it goes against the spirit of China's socio-political reform.<sup>23</sup> Wang then proposes that the church should construct itself according to three-self principles, yet without an organisation to lead the Three-Self movement. This means the church's leadership organisation should be a church organisation rather than a politicalised 'three-self' organisation.<sup>24</sup> In these statements, Wang's criticism is pointed to the TSPM's government administration feature and its inappropriate and mistaken leadership over the church. He does not deny the TSPM itself or the church's adaptation to socialist China. His concern is the healthy development of the church which he intends to safeguard from a politicalised church leadership. This is perhaps Wang's strongest criticism against the TSPM and his boldest suggestion on its church leadership system. Nevertheless, this strong criticism did not last long, and his suggestion was not received by any authorities.

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<sup>23</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Rang Jidu Chengwei Jiaohui de Tou' [Let Christ Be the Head of the Church], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1988), 450.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*, 451.



When the demand for deeper reforms in many cities throughout China was expressed through massive student demonstrations in early 1989, they were crushed by the army in the Tiananmen square on the fourth of June. Strong criticism and a massive demonstration were thus cruelly proven intolerable by the regime. After this, Wang's strong criticism against the TSPM is missing in his later writing. In 1989, however, Wang's criticism can still be seen when he states that the church is in the hands of those people who do not know nor love the church, nor understand believers' religious needs and emotions.<sup>25</sup> This criticism seems to refer to either government officials or some of the TSPM leaders. In whatever case, his criticism was discreet, and he avoided directly mentioning the target of his criticism.

Although Wang's suggestion on a reform of the church leadership system did not result in any change, he was nonetheless concerned about the church as the body of Christ. Based on 1 Corinthians 12:12-19, Wang explains the unity of the church and the diversity of its members. He expresses support towards post-denominational unified worship services from the 1950s, and he also ascribes to the Chinese 'homogeneous view' (*qi wu guan*) and a logical thinking of unity of one and many as fostering the joint services.<sup>26</sup> With regard to the church from the 1980s, Wang explains that the 'China Christian Council' is a council among many churches in joint service, rather than one among different denominations. Wang then suggests that as the Chinese churches and China Christian councils have existed and worked together for two decades (1980s-1990s), it is advisable to remove the word 'council,'

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<sup>25</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Cong Shenxuesheng Sixiang Dongxiang Kan Zhongguo Jiaohui de Weiji' [Expose the Crises of the Chinese Church Through the Thought Trends of Seminary Students], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1989), 547.

<sup>26</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Shenti Zhiyou Yige' [There Is Only One Body], in *Shi Nian Juju* (1999), 328.

therefore, changing the name ‘China Christian Council’ (*Zhongguo Jidujiao Xiehui*) to ‘Chinese Christian Church’ (*Zhongguo Jidu Jiaohui*), and change ‘Christian council’ into ‘Christian church’ in all local levels.<sup>27</sup> Wang here seems to suggest a single and unified Chinese church, which, of course, is the one affiliated with the TSPM. However, by constructing a unified Chinese church affiliated with the TSPM, Wang does not necessarily mean to exclude those churches not affiliated with the TSPM. Instead, Wang explains that some religious believers have, for various reasons, not joined patriotic religious organisations.<sup>28</sup> Wang understands that these believers are not against three-self principles, nor involved in illegal activities or connected with foreign anti-China forces. To the contrary, they are patriotic in their deeds. Therefore, Wang urges that they should be recognised and united, rather than being labelled as anti-TSPM or anti-patriotism.<sup>29</sup>

Wang’s suggestion of a single and unified Chinese church echoes Cheng Jingyi’s speech, delivered in the Edinburgh 1910 World Missionary Conference, on the mystery of the Chinese people in their dislike of denominationalism and favour of a unified Chinese church.<sup>30</sup> While Wang echoes Cheng who was more liberal in theology, he differs from Jia Yuming (1880-1964), an Evangelical who did not link

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<sup>27</sup> Wang adds that there should be certain flexibility if the name is changed, allowing more freedom of choice to local churches. Besides, it is necessary to establish a church government system which will fit properly the Chinese church. *Ibid.*, 338.

<sup>28</sup> The reasons include: (1) Christians live far away therefore cannot attend Three-Self churches; (2) Three-Self church buildings cannot accommodate too many Christians; (3) some Christians are not available for Sunday services and therefore need meetings in other days in houses; (4) others are not satisfied with Three-Self church services because of denominational backgrounds; (5) Christian meetings emerge in areas where no Three-Self churches exist and; (6) still others distrust some of the TSPM leaders. Wang Weifan, ‘Tan Jidujiao De Xianzhuang Wenti’ [Talk About the Present Situation of Christianity], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1991), 285-88.

<sup>29</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Shilun Gonggu He Fazhan Tong Zongjiaojie De Aiguo Tongyi Zhanxian’ [On Consolidate and Develop the Patriotic United Front with Religious Circle], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1992), 318-19.

<sup>30</sup> World Missionary Conference, *Report of Commission VIII* (Edinburgh, 1910), 196. Cf. Wang, ‘The Church Unity Movement in Early-Twentieth Century China,’ 99.

the organisational form of church unity with patriotism. As Jia was a well-known first generation Chinese Evangelical pastor and theologian, Wang was deeply influenced by Jia's spiritual pietism and a this-worldly concern for society.<sup>31</sup> However, being 47 years older than Wang, Jia started ministry in a time when foreign missions dominated Christianity in China, and his ecclesiology transcended the notion of state. Jia's participation in church independence and unity movement was primarily driven by a purpose of the better development of the church, rather than by a concern for national independence.<sup>32</sup> He appreciated a loving relationship between a foreign mother church and its Chinese daughter church, and never thought of getting rid of foreign missions for the sake of patriotism.<sup>33</sup> Therefore, Jia prioritises 'unity in life' rather than unity in outward form.<sup>34</sup> Contrary to Jia, Wang prefers a visible unity of church institution. Wang keeps the same tone with the TSPM and considers severing the relationship with foreign missions a necessary means to acquire church independence and the political independence of the nation.

With an inclination towards church unification, Wang supported the TSPM and the Communist regime since the 1950s. His historical reflection in the 1980s explained further and enhanced his support. Then in the 1990s, Wang formally proposed his idea of a unified Chinese church on a basis of the following: first, that the TSPM had brought many Protestants into a so-called 'post-denominational era,'

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<sup>31</sup> Yuan, 74.

<sup>32</sup> Wang Delong, 'Lun Jiayuming de "Zili Heyi" Sixiang' [On Jia Yuming's Thought of Independence and Unity], *Weifang Xueyuan Xuebao* [Journal of Weifang University] 17, no. 1 (February 2017): 6.

<sup>33</sup> Guo Weilian, *Fandui Heyi?! Jia Yuming, Jiyao Zhuyi Yu Heyi Yundong de Jiujie* [Against Unity?! Jia Yuming, Entanglement Between Fundamentalism and the Unity Movement] (Hong Kong: Tiandao Press, 2002), 74-91. Quoted in Lu Qiankun, 'Zhangcheng Jidu de Shenliang-Qiantan Jia Yuming Mushi de Jiaohuilun' [Growing to the Measure of the Stature of the Fullness of Christ-On the Ecclesiology of Pastor Jia Yuming], *Jinling Shenxuezhishi* [Nanjing Theological Review], no. 2 (2013): 75.

<sup>34</sup> Ibid.

and second, that the China Christian Councils and Chinese churches had been working closely together since the 1980s. While the TSPM may have provided a precondition and therefore possibility of officially forming a unified Chinese church, Wang's inclination towards a Chinese 'homogeneous view' is also in favour of church unification.

#### 4.2.2 Chinese Culture's Role in Chinese Theology

As Wang is concerned about healthy development of the church, his suggestion moves beyond the idea of a unified Chinese church and includes an expectation of a Chinese theology. Referring to his definition of Chinese theology, Wang explains what it may look like:

A Christian holding Chinese cultural learning and moral integrity, brings the Chinese church, society and the whole nation's thoughts, bewilderment and expectations. The Christian then bows before God's throne and face, listens to God's revelation and words from the Bible, takes the Bible as a burden or a bone in the throat, and proclaims and shouts it out to believers and the nation's people from the watch tower.<sup>35</sup>

This illustration of Wang depicts several significant points that depict the basic profile of a Chinese theology: Chinese culture, moral integrity, a burden for both the church and society, God's sovereignty and the authority of the Bible. Among these points, Wang highly values and substantially explains Chinese culture's role in Chinese theology. The following sections will explore Wang's recognition of the necessity of Christianity's adaptation to culture, his observation on the compatibility and advantages of Chinese culture, his elaborations on great Chinese humanistic learning (*zhongguo da renwen xuewen*) and the concept of the noble person Christian (*jidutu junzi*), and his proposal of an ever-generating theology (*shengsheng shenxue*).

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<sup>35</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Rujin Changcun de You Xin' [Now We Have Abiding Faith], in *Shi Nian Juju* (2002), 228.

The Necessity of Christianity's adaptation to Traditional Chinese Culture

Thinking of a Chinese theology, Wang recognises the necessity of Christianity's adaptation to Chinese culture. In a speech delivered in an Asian conference, Wang addresses the spiritual basis of Asian people:

When the gospel is introduced to a certain cultural context, it will go through a process of mutual fusion or integration; therefore, there will emerge a theological or spiritual oval with two foci. In Northern America and Europe, their culture, theology and spirituality all originated from the same core of Christian faith. But for Asians, due to their long history and lasting traditional cultures, their theological structure or spiritual image has been and will be like an oval with two foci.<sup>36</sup>

Here Wang does not suggest that North American and European culture, theology and spirituality are admirable because they all originated from the Christian faith and do not illustrate a theological oval with two foci. Rather, his point is to justify Asian culture and spirituality. Wang claims, 'Asian people's culture and history, philosophy and logic, practice and spirit are the unshakable spiritual basis and irreplaceable theological foundation for Asians.'<sup>37</sup> As it is true in Asia, it is also true in China. China is a nation of long history and cultural tradition; therefore, 'trying to spread the gospel throughout China without understanding and respecting traditional Chinese culture is rude.'<sup>38</sup> To be more specific,

A tendency of emphasising humans' helplessness, inability and futility is destined to be rejected in China. Likewise, as traditional Chinese culture honours a spirit of tolerance and inclusiveness, it is impossible for Chinese people to admire or honour a Christianity that is dominated by a spirit of narrowness and exclusiveness. It will be difficult for Chinese people to accept if Christianity fails to provide some practical nourishment for Chinese people's historical, social and spiritual practices.<sup>39</sup>

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<sup>36</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Yazhou Ren de Lingxing Jichu' [The Spiritual Basis of the Asian People], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1996), 78.

<sup>37</sup> *Ibid.*, 83.

<sup>38</sup> Wang, '1949 Nian Qian de,' 432.

<sup>39</sup> *Ibid.*, 433.

With this statement, Wang intends to demand a Chinese Christianity that will respect and accommodate Chinese cultural concepts like human effort and responsibility, great harmony (*da tong*) and moral cultivation. Wang comments that a spirit of narrowness and exclusiveness, which deny proper Chinese human relations and ethics, has been a matter of life and death for Christianity in Chinese history.<sup>40</sup> He then endorses the Taiwanese Catholic church in basing their theological thinking and spiritual pursuit on filial piety.<sup>41</sup> Wang does not explain further what this refers to. Most probably, he is referring to the Taiwanese Catholic church's promotion of ancestral practices, which were first publicly conducted and promoted in the form of traditional Chinese ritual by the cardinal Yu Bin in 1971.<sup>42</sup> While such practices are not accepted by most Protestant churches in mainland China, Wang is inclined to support them in recognition of traditional Chinese culture. It should be noted that Wang frequently uses the term '*zhongguo chuantong wenhua*' (traditional Chinese culture), instead of '*zhongguo wenhua*' (Chinese culture). This seems to proceed from his interest and emphasis on Chinese culture in the form of Chinese classics from ancient times. Meanwhile, Wang does not refer to or discuss New Confucianism (*xin rujia*) or Humanistic Buddhism (*renjian fojiao*), which emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century as Confucian and Buddhist responses to New Culture critics and China's quest of modernisation. In Wang's passion for traditional Chinese

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<sup>40</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Yao Jianli Ju Zhongguo Tese de Shenxue' [The Necessity to Construct a Chinese Theology with Chinese Characteristics], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1997), 542. Wang here seems to refer to the Rites Controversy, which resulted in the ban of Catholicism in China during the Qing Dynasty.

<sup>41</sup> Wang, 'Yazhou Ren de Lingxing,' 78-79.

<sup>42</sup> Umberto Bresciani, 'Ancestor Worship and Cardinal Yu Bin,' *Ching Feng* 3, no. 1-2 (October 2002), 5.

culture, he does not seem interested or agree with those recent developments in Confucianism and Buddhism.

### Compatibility and Advantages of Traditional Chinese Culture

Because Wang considers Chinese theology as both Chinese and Christian, he understands traditional Chinese culture and Christianity as highly compatible. To Wang, this compatibility has been revealed since ancient times. He understands the ‘*dao*’ in *Laozi* as referring to God.<sup>43</sup> Likewise, he endorses the Portuguese missionary Matteo Ricci’s interpretation, ‘My God is just the Lord on High mentioned in ancient Chinese classics.’<sup>44</sup> Wang takes inspiration from Romans 1:19-20 and Acts 17:27-28, which explain that God’s eternal power and divine nature have been clearly perceived so that people perhaps can feel their way toward God and find Him. He then interprets the three Chinese ritual texts *Zhou Li* (*The Rites of Zhou*), *Yi Li* (*The Book of Etiquette and Ceremony*) and *Li Ji* (*The Book of Rites*) as ancient Chinese sages’ feeling and finding God through His instructions on sacrifices, sanctification, and love toward humankind.<sup>45</sup> To Wang, all this suggests that ancient Chinese people worshipped God.

Besides ancient Chinese literature, Wang also observes the compatibility between Christianity and Chinese culture through his understanding of mother’s love theology in contemporary life and literature. Wang explains that although his mother was a genuine Buddhist, through his mother’s love, which was ‘nurtured by

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<sup>43</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Ren Yu Dadi’ [Humankind and the Earth], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1996), 84.

<sup>44</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Duxing Pian’ [On Earnest Practice], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1997), 119.

<sup>45</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Li Zhi Shenxue Fansi’ [Theological Reflection on Rites], in *Shi Nian Juju* (1997), 28-29.

traditional Chinese culture,' he observes an image of Christ.<sup>46</sup> Wang also regards one of the poems of the contemporary Chinese poet, Bing Xin, who is not known as Christian, as having 'the language of the cross' due to its way of describing a mother's love.<sup>47</sup> The basis of this mother's love theology, according to Wang, is that since Mary conceives 'the Word in the flesh' - Christ in the flesh - in a mother's love there is an image of the suffering servant. This servant is a loving Christ who sacrifices and dies for the sake of love.<sup>48</sup> Wang seems convinced about mother's love theology and God's revelation in contemporary Chinese culture as he refers to Bishop Ding Guangxun and Xie Fuya who also express theological thoughts on mother's love.<sup>49</sup> Although mother love is a common virtue in humanity, Wang perceives a connection between this common virtue and God's revelation through the example of Mary's conception of Christ. Yet, Wang's point is that God's revelation can be observed through a mother's love, which is expressed in the form of Chinese culture in China. In other words, in Chinese culture in general and a mother's love in particular, people can observe God's revelation.

In addition to the compatibility between Christianity and Chinese culture, Wang also perceives certain advantages of traditional Chinese culture in building a Chinese theology. The first advantage has to do with traditional Chinese logic form and Chinese way of thinking. Wang comments that the philosophical basis of the

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<sup>46</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Dao Zai Zheli Chengle Roushen' [The Word Was Here Made Flesh], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1992), 56.

<sup>47</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Zhongguo de Muai Wenxue He Muai Shenxue' [Mother's Love Literature and Mother's Love Theology in China], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1995), 68.

<sup>48</sup> *Ibid.*, 76.

<sup>49</sup> *Ibid.*, 70-71. Cf. Ding Guangxun, 'Nvxing, Muxing, Shenxing' [Woman, Mother, Divinity], in *Jinling Shenxue Wenxuan, 1952-1992* [Selected Works of Nanjing Theological Review, 1952-1992], eds. Chen Zemin, Wang Weifan, and Zhang Xianyong (Nanjing: NUTS, 1992), 33. Xie Fuya, 'Wode Muqin' [My Mother], in *Ju Liu Diandi* [Drops of a Mighty Stream] (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council Ltd., 1970), 50.



traditional Chinese logic form includes the metaphysics of *yin* and *yang*, which refers to the duality and complementarity between different matters. Besides this, it also includes the correlation between heaven, earth and humanity, which means the compatibility rather than contradiction among heaven, earth and humanity. Wang therefore believes that if the Chinese church returns to traditional Chinese logic forms, it will not be difficult to get rid of some theological dilemmas experienced by Westerners. These dilemmas include the oppositions between loving God and loving humanity, this-worldliness and other-worldliness, faith and deeds, sacred posts and secular jobs, spirituality and service, and eternity and the present.<sup>50</sup> Wang also believes that the Confucian concept of great harmony (*da tong*), which includes an emphasis on harmonious social relationships, is helpful for fostering mutual respect and bringing unity among the churches in China.<sup>51</sup> Besides a special Chinese logic form, Wang explains that in contrast to the Greek definition and language based way of thinking, the Chinese way of thinking is image based which is intuitive, holistic, holographic, and multidimensional.<sup>52</sup> The Chinese way of thinking is also a-logical or transcending-logic, and relies on discernment rather than logic and language. It adjusts according to specific situations, combining principle and accommodation, advocating harmony and modesty. Wang believes that these characteristics are more helpful for Chinese Christians to understand God's will, wisdom and work in the Chinese context.<sup>53</sup> The second advantage is when studying classics, Chinese people

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<sup>50</sup> Wang, 'Chuantong Luoji Xingshi,' 114.

<sup>51</sup> Wang considers the Chinese church's entering an era of post-denominationalism under the TSPM an example of unity. Wang Weifan, 'Zhongguo Jiaohui Shenxue Sikao zhi Tese' [The Characteristics of the Chinese Church's Theological Thinking], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1991), 50.

<sup>52</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Dujing Yu Zhongguo Chuantong Siwei' [Bible Reading and Traditional Chinese Thinking], in *Shi Nian Juju* (1998), 5-9.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 16.

have an interest in ‘essential principles’ (*yi li*), which refers primarily to the essences and principles of religion, human relationships, and ways of conducting oneself in society. Wang perceives these ‘essential principles’ as helpful for Chinese Christians to understand the triune God, to seek spiritual life and to conduct oneself properly in social relationships, rather than having focus on abstract and rational methodology.<sup>54</sup>

Believing in the advantages of traditional Chinese culture, Wang is also optimistic about its condition in the present time. Wang personally went through difficult times during the Cultural Revolution. However, when he wrote in 1988, Wang believed that Chinese people had rethought the Cultural Revolution, reflecting on traditional Chinese culture, Western culture, Marxism, and religious culture, learning a lesson with a serious attitude. Wang therefore envisioned ‘a great Eastern nation, remoulding herself through inheriting all excellent human cultural heritages, gaining rebirth from a ruin of death.’<sup>55</sup> Later in the middle of 1990s, Wang realised that many people became explosively greedy and considered traditional Chinese culture a primary reason for China’s poverty and backwardness. However, Wang held his confidence and observed that many scholars started to calmly distinguish the good from the bad and select the essence and discard the dross in Chinese culture. He believes that through the May Fourth Movement, the Cultural Revolution and the Reform and Opening Up policy, traditional Chinese culture has gone through a hundred year of testing, refinement and purification.<sup>56</sup>

Having this confidence, Wang is optimistic about developing a Chinese theology. He believes that the cultural sources of a Chinese theology are still

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<sup>54</sup> Ibid., 4.

<sup>55</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Huimie, Fansi, Zaisheng’ [Destruction, Reflection, Rebirth], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang*, (1988), 460-61.

<sup>56</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Jiji Yu Weiji’ [Jiji and Weiji], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1995), 97.

preserved in Chinese cultural classics, like the six classic books (*Shi, Shu, Li, Yue, Yi, Chunqiu*) and the Hundred Schools of Thought (*zhu zi bai jia*), and held in contemporary Chinese people's 'cultural psychology' (*wenhua xinli*).<sup>57</sup> Apart from the rich cultural sources, Wang believes that the church in China is undergoing a rich variety of spiritual experience unreachable at any time in the past. Therefore, it is expected that in the garden of Christ, there will be 'a blossoming of Eastern characteristics, elegant and quiet, white and fragrant flowers.'<sup>58</sup>

#### Great Chinese Humanistic Learning (*Zhongguo Da Renwen Xuewen*)

When Chinese culture is understood in a form of 'cultural learning,' Wang refers to it as 'great humanistic learning' in the sense of its inclusiveness, which embodies heaven and earth, universe, nature, ecology, society and human ethics and transfers them into an ever-generating process of interconversion.<sup>59</sup> With this inclusiveness, Wang finds Xie Fuya's statement concerning religious spirituality inspiring:

The so-called spirit is a person's inner spiritual ability, which can be cultivated to be able to communicate with even be assimilated by the spirit of the vast universe. In this way, he receives this almighty's support, and becomes full of boldness, daring to go through extremely dangerous situations, being willing to jump into the world to rescue millions of common people. When the religious believer devotes himself or herself to the big spirit of the vast universe and forgets the small self, he or she will then get rid of any thought of selfishness. This is because...one's spirit has been breathing with the vast universe, forgetting all things, fame and wealth and power. Even one's own body no longer belongs to oneself. This is the so-called 'other-worldliness.' Yet, being

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<sup>57</sup> Ibid., 99.

<sup>58</sup> Wang, 'Mantan Zichuan,' 420-21.

<sup>59</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Rang Shenxue Chengwei Yimen Zhongguo Xuewen' [Let Theology Become a Chinese Learning], in *Shi Nian Juju* (1997), 204.

other-worldly does not mean being negative or empty, but rather being positive and willing to jump into ‘abyss of misery’ (*ku hai*) to rescue the masses.<sup>60</sup>

Xie here refers to religious believers in general, therefore making his statement inclusive. The idea of ‘breathing with the vast universe’ (*yu da yuzhou tong huxi*) sounds very Daoist. The assertion of ‘jump into abyss of misery to rescue the masses’ (*tiaoru kuhai qu zhengjiu zhongsheng*) is reminiscent of a Buddhist idea, and the idea of being cultivated, positive and responsible to the world certainly sounds Confucian. Since great Chinese humanistic learning is inclusive, Wang believes that Chinese theology should be inclusive as well; ‘if theology does not embody ethical and religious connotations nor is it a helpful guide of conduct in society, that cannot be learning in the sense of Chinese culture.’<sup>61</sup> In other words, a Chinese theology should provide instructions for Chinese Christians in areas like morality, social ethics and spirituality, which are also the inclusive concerns of Chinese learning (*zhongguo xuewen*).

Besides inclusiveness, Wang also addresses the practical dimension of Chinese theology in relation to Chinese learning. Again, Wang gains inspiration from Xie Fuya, who proposes that while the West exercises the approach of ‘knowing-approving-believing’ and produces splendid Christian theology, a Chinese approach of ‘doing-experiencing-believing’ will create a magnificent Chinese Christian civilisation.<sup>62</sup> Wang develops this idea of Xie further, suggesting that a

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<sup>60</sup> Xie Fuya, ‘Yu Ding Guangxun Zhujiao Shangque “Wushenlunzhe de Xingling”’ [Discussion with Bishop Ding Guangxun About Athiest’s Spirituality], in *Xie Fuya Wannian Jidujiao Sixiang Lunji* [Collection of Xie Fuya’s Christian Thought in His Old Age] (Hong Kong: Chinese Christian Literature Council Ltd., 1986). 37-38. Quoted in Wang Weifan, ‘Qiancheng Pian’ [On Piety], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1997), 138.

<sup>61</sup> Wang, ‘Rang Shenxue Chengwei,’ 202.

<sup>62</sup> Xie Fuya, ‘Zhongguo Wenhua Yu Jidujiao Zai Hua de Zhanwang’ [Outlook of Chinese Culture and Christianity in China], in *Xie Fuya Wannian Jidujiao Sixiang Lunji* [Collection of Xie Fuya’s Christian Thought in His Old Age], 108. Quoted in Wang, ‘Duxing Pian,’ 117.

Chinese theology will be a combination of ‘believing-knowing-doing.’<sup>63</sup> Here Wang changes Xie’s order, placing believing first and doing at the last. This change reflects Wang’s Evangelical stand of taking belief as coming before deeds. But still in this changed order, Wang keeps an interest in doing. In line with an interest in doing, Wang endorses Xie’s idea that, instead of a Western ‘Christology’ or ‘doctrine of Christ’ (*jidu lun*), in China there will be a ‘learning of Christ’ (*jidu xue*), which takes no interest in doctrines and debates, but transcends them and takes a straight path to seek both God and the man Jesus Christ and his life experience.<sup>64</sup> Likewise, Wang considers theology as understanding God in one’s life experience:

God is not an object for study, and humble and ignorant sinners are not worthy to talk about or describe God. In this sense, theology is a kind of honouring, seeking and listening to God in one’s life experience. It is a learning practice of one’s spirit, having the characteristics of Chinese great learning of words and revelation from heaven.<sup>65</sup>

As God is to be understood through life experience, Wang criticises specialised, narrow and fragmented theological research as opposed to personality cultivation. He insists that a status of ‘inward sagehood and outward kingship’ (*nei sheng wai wang*) is what Chinese theological researchers are supposed to achieve.<sup>66</sup>

Wang draws sources from great Chinese humanistic learning in general, and he finds Xie Fuya a particularly inspiring example of integrating Chinese theology with Chinese learning. However, it should be noted that in his early years, Xie was a theological liberal who considered American liberal theology a means of reviving China. It was not until the 1970s that Xie repudiated American liberal theology. However, unlike Zhao Zichen who turned to neo-orthodox theology after giving up

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<sup>63</sup> Wang, ‘Jidujiao Sishi Nian,’ 481.

<sup>64</sup> Wang, ‘Rang Shenxue Chengwei,’ 206.

<sup>65</sup> *Ibid.*, 207.

<sup>66</sup> *Ibid.*, 205-06.

liberal theology, Xie turned to traditional Chinese culture and emphasised Christianity's role of enriching and fulfilling Chinese culture after he moved out of mainland China to Hong Kong and then the U.S..<sup>67</sup> Xie urged Chinese Christians to reject Western Christianity and embrace Chinese forms of Christianity since the latter is fully rooted in traditional Chinese ideas, particularly Confucianism.<sup>68</sup> Apart from his interest in Christianity and Chinese culture, it is worth noticing that Xie was also a religious philosopher influenced by Alfred Whitehead when he studied at Harvard University in 1926. In keeping with his Evangelical stand, Wang does not share Xie's liberal theology or interest in religious philosophy. What appeals to Wang is rather Xie's insights on traditional Chinese culture and its role in Chinese theology.

#### The Noble Person Christian (*Jidutu Junzi*)

As moral integrity occupies a key position in traditional Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism, Wang highly values the idea of 'the noble person Christian,' a term first used by Xie Fuya in the 1970,<sup>69</sup> as referring to the 'Chinese theological searcher who has Chinese style of learning and ethical practice.'<sup>70</sup> Wang reveres the first generation of Chinese theologians who emerged before and after the May Fourth Movement, including figures like Zhao Zichen, Xie Fuya, Jia Yuming, Wu Yaozong, Liu Tingfang, Xu Baoqian and Wu Leichuan, as a group of noble person Christians. He notes that almost without exception, these Chinese theologians

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<sup>67</sup> See Ho Hing-Cheong and Lai Pan-chiu, 'A Chinese Christian Intellectual in Diaspora: A Case Study of Xie Fuya,' *Monumenta Serica* 56, no. 1 (December 2008): 442-44.

<sup>68</sup> Albert Wu, 'Forever A Patriot: Chinese Christians and the Repudiation of American Liberal Protestantism' *Journal of the American Academy of Religion* 85, no. 1 (March 2017): 116.

<sup>69</sup> Cf. Xie, *Ju Liu Diandi*. Xie might use the term earlier than 1970 in informal form.

<sup>70</sup> Wang, 'Jiji Yu Weiji,' 97.

were intellectuals who received higher theological education and were nurtured by traditional Chinese culture.<sup>71</sup> Among these figures, Zhao Zichen in his early years focused on Jesus' personality and its application to humankind. Wang shares the same interest with Zhao. However, Wang seems to value more of Xie's idea of the noble person Christian, perhaps because this term is directly taken from the Chinese term *junzi* (noble person), therefore better reflecting Chinese culture. This is also true when Wang regards the Confucian style noble person, or Chinese hero, as admirable for Christians.<sup>72</sup> To Wang, both the notion of the Confucian noble person and the later-developed idea of the noble person Christian have great value for Chinese theology.

The idea of the noble person Christian has implications in Wang's understanding of a Chinese theology. Although Wang understands that a Chinese theology should not be detached from the Chinese church, he believes that 'theology has a relatively far distance from common believers' level and includes content which they cannot fully understand.'<sup>73</sup> Wang acknowledges Chinese peasants' simplicity, honesty and kindness. However, he points out that some boorishness, superstition and folk religion witchcraft have been brought into the church and feed on Christianity. The church is therefore challenged to help peasant Christians to remove cultural dross and improve their faith and spiritual qualities.<sup>74</sup> With reference to Wang's respect for the Chinese classics and at the same time criticism against the superstitious elements in Chinese culture, Alexander Chow comments that Wang's

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<sup>71</sup> Wang, 'Zhongguo Jiaohui Shenxue Sikao,' 28.

<sup>72</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Shengling Yu Heyi' [The Holy Spirit and Unity], in *Shi Nian Juju* (1998), 342.

<sup>73</sup> Wang, 'Jiji Yu Weiji,' 94.

<sup>74</sup> Wang, 'Dao Zai Zheli,' 59.

attitude towards traditional Chinese culture takes an elitist form.<sup>75</sup> This elitist form matches Wang's valuation of the noble person Christian. Therefore, to Wang, a Chinese theology, enriched by traditional Chinese culture, is normally constructed by noble person Christians rather than common believers who do not possess necessary cultural quality.

Taking an elitist form in both Chinese culture and Chinese theology, Wang values the so-called cultural Christians. He considers cultural Christians to be 'unbaptised Christians' or 'unnamed Christians' who stay outside the church yet discuss Christianity and theology through their writings. Wang perceives cultural Christians as bringing both a contribution and a challenge, which should push church ministers, workers, seminarians and faculty to improve their cultural level (*wenhua suyang*), build the basis for dialogue, and bring cultural Christians into the church.<sup>76</sup> Holding this open view, Wang once worked as one of the associate editors of the journal series of *Christian Cultural Review (Jidujiao Wenhua Pinglun)*, which had the well-known cultural Christians Liu Xiaofeng and He Guanghu as editors.

#### An Ever-Generating Theology (*Shengsheng Shenxue*)

With the idea of the noble person Christian, Wang recognises that the Catholic and Protestant missions' encounter with Confucian morality has been the latest and dominant case of encounter between Christianity and Chinese culture. However, Wang also explains another encounter in ancient times. When the Eastern Church missions encountered ancient Chinese cosmology, which was presented mainly in the *Book of Changes (Yijing)*, they portrayed a God who was continually

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<sup>75</sup> Chow, 'Wang Weifan's Cosmic Christ,' 392-93.

<sup>76</sup> Wang, 'Dao Zai Zheli,' 58-59.



generating life. Wang calls this God an ever-generating God (*shengsheng shen*) - a God who continually generates life.<sup>77</sup> Accordingly, Wang proposes an ever-generating theology (*shengsheng shenxue*).<sup>78</sup> According to Wang, this ever-generating theology has a focus on 'life' (*sheng*): 'God creates and sustains life; Christ saves and fulfils life; humankind protects and supports life and pursues self-improvement, going on without end.'<sup>79</sup> In this ever-generating process, Christ's work of salvation is not an interruption but the continuation of God's work of creation.<sup>80</sup> Accordingly, Wang understands the end of human history not as a tragedy, but as a renewed world,<sup>81</sup> which is renewed by God, redeemed by Christ, and sanctified by the Holy Spirit.<sup>82</sup> Then, the role of humankind is to protect and support lives. Wang believes that the great value of ever-generating theology is that it helps to pick up the ancient Chinese Christian spirit of 'constantly striving to become stronger, the lives of living beings continuing without end, and with the help of power from heaven,

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<sup>77</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Chinese Traditional Culture and Its Influences on Chinese Theological Reflection,' *Chinese Theological Review* 13, (1999): 4-6.

<sup>78</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Ershiyi Shiji dui Zhongguo Gudai Shengsheng Shenxue de Zhaohuan' [A Call for Ancient Chinese Ever-Generating Theology in the Twenty-First Century], *Jinling Shenxuezhì* [*Nanjing Theological Review*], no. 1 (1996): 4, 7.

An article on '*shengsheng shenxue*,' written by a Malaysian Chinese Luo Huaqing, was published slightly earlier than Wang's article. Wang mentioned Luo's article, but he explained that both he and Luo 'simultaneously proposed' *shengsheng shenxue* in 1995. Wang, 'Yazhou Ren de Lingxing,' 82.

Cf. Luo Huaqing, 'Yijing "Shengsheng Yuzhouguan" yu Shengjing "Shengsheng Shenxue" Chutan' [Initial Exploration on An Ever-Generating Cosmic View in *Yijing* and An Ever-Generating Theology in the Bible], *Jinling Shenxuezhì* [*Nanjing Theological Review*], no. 1 (1996): 19-24; no. 2 (1996): 20-23. Luo's article was originally published in a Chinese American Journal *Wenhua Zhongguo* [*Cultural China*], September 1994.

<sup>79</sup> Wang, 'Ershiyi Shiji dui Zhongguo Gudai,' 4.

<sup>80</sup> Wang Weifan, *Jiben Yaodao* [*Basic Doctrines*] (Shanghai: China Christian Council, 1985), 16. Quoted in Yuan, 89.

<sup>81</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Cong "Zhouyi" Youhuan Yishi Tan Xianzhi Jingshen' [Talk about Prophetic Spirit Based on An Awareness of Hardship and Anxiety from the *Book of Changes*], in *Shi Nian Juju* (1999), 53.

<sup>82</sup> Yuan, 149. Cf. Wang, 'Dao Zai Zheli,' 57. Wang Weifan, 'Shengming Yunyu zhi Ling' [The Spirit Who Breeds Life], in *Jinling Shenxue Wenxuan 1952-1992* [*Selected Works of Nanjing Theological Review 1952-1992*], eds. Chen Zemin, Wang Weifan, and Zhang Xianyong (Nanjing: NUTS, 1992), 45.

making some achievements' (*zhiqiang buxi, shengsheng buyi, jiezhu tianli, yousuo zuowei*).<sup>83</sup> In his view of an ever-generating theology, Wang seems to treasure most a sense of optimism, a spirit of constant striving and an attitude of active engagement with the world, and he considers these as having great potential for developing a Chinese theology.

It may have been a general impression that Wang holds a high regard towards traditional Chinese culture, and he highly values its role in Chinese theology. With a passion for Chinese culture, Wang demands Christianity's adaptation to the former. Nevertheless, it should be noted that although being impassioned about Chinese culture and its role in Chinese theology, Wang holds to an Evangelical view of Christian doctrine and Chinese culture. Apart from his acknowledgement of God's sovereignty and the authority of the Bible, as described in his definition of Chinese theology, Wang insists on the transcendence of the Christian faith in comparison to Chinese culture. For example, he explains that while the ancient Chinese scholar Zeng Zi's saying, 'I examine myself three times a day' is based on Confucian concepts of loyalty, sincerity and earnestness in human interrelationship, a godly Christian's self-examination is done before a transcendent God.<sup>84</sup> Likewise, in comparison between *Leviticus* and *the Book of Rites (Li Ji)*, Wang comments that although their instructions on human relationships are accordant, *the Book of Rites* is on the level of human ethics, yet *Leviticus* deals with human relationships with a

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<sup>83</sup> Wang, 'Ershiyi Shiji dui Zhongguo Gudai,' 6.

<sup>84</sup> Wang, 'Qiancheng Pian,' 144.

precondition of acknowledging and honouring a transcendent God.<sup>85</sup> Thus, although Wang emphasises Chinese culture's 'unshakeable' role in Chinese theology, he nevertheless recognises its limitations and keeps an Evangelical perspective on the distinction between the Christian faith and Chinese culture.

The previous discussions show that in Wang's support of the TSPM and the Communist regime, he proposes the formation of 'a unified Chinese church,' and in his passion for traditional Chinese culture, he advocates the development of 'a Chinese theology.' Meanwhile, Wang frequently uses the term 'Chinese Christianity' (*zhongguo jidujiao*) in his discussions in various fields, including history, culture, society, politics and theology. When Wang refers to Chinese Christians' Christianity, either in the past or in the present, he prefers to use the term 'Chinese Christianity.' Thus, Wang proposes the formation of a unified Chinese church and the development of a Chinese theology and by these two proposals surely aspires to shape the future of Chinese Christianity.

#### 4.2.3 The Church's Relationship with the State and the Society

Wang's idea of a unified Chinese church indicates his support towards the TSPM and the Communist regime, and his idea of a Chinese theology shows a concern for the Chinese people and appreciation of traditional Chinese culture. Both ideas somehow reveal Wang's concern and engagement with the historical, socio-political and cultural contexts in China. Yet with regard to Wang's approach towards

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<sup>85</sup> Wang, 'Li Zhi Shenxue,' 38-40. It is noted that Wang's idea of 'a transcendent God' is akin to Liu Xiaofeng's idea, which explains that neither 'inner transcendence' (*neizai chaoyue*) nor 'unity of heaven and humanity' (*tian ren heyi*) in Confucianism is possible because in Chinese concept *tian* (heaven) and humans were never separated originally. Meanwhile, Liu explains that it is in Christianity that a transcendent God is revealed. See Fällman, *Salvation and Modernity*, 65. Also, Liu Xiaofeng, 'Tian Wen yu Chao Yan zhi Wen' [Heaven Asking and Transcendence Asking] in *Zhengjiu yu Xiaoyao* [Salvation and Easy Wandering] (Shanghai: People's Press, 1988).

the socio-political context, it is still necessary to explore his view concerning the church's relationship with the state and the society. It should be noted that in his discussion on the church's relationship with the state and the society, Wang frequently uses more general terms like 'Christianity' and 'religion,' instead of 'the church.' This is perhaps because Wang considers these general terms more helpful for reaching a broad audience, including those outside the church. In other words, as Wang may intend to present the church being unified as a witness of Christ in the world, he is not as interested in the institution of the church.

### The Church's Relationship with the State

Generally speaking, Wang views a close relationship between the church and the state. As noted earlier, Wang supports the TSPM and the Communist regime, and he explains that the church shares the same fate as China's socialist system. However, this does not reveal the whole picture. Wang understands the church as part of the socialist cause, operating under the Communist regime. Yet, at the same time, Wang argues for a space for Christianity, explains its distinctive role in an atheist state, and describes its significant contribution to socialist China.

Wang's argument for a space for Christianity can be seen from his discussion on freedom of religious belief. Wang affirms that China's guiding ideology is Marxism, Leninism and Mao Zedong thought, which are prescribed by the state's Constitution. However, these are not for only promoting atheism. Wang argues that it is a basic principle of Marxism-Leninism and Mao Zedong thought that freedom of religious belief should be granted, and religious people should be united.<sup>86</sup> However,

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<sup>86</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Tantan Xianfa (1978) Di Si Shi Liu Tiao' [Discussion on the Article 46 of the Constitution (1978)], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1981), 194.

Wang expresses his concern on the matter. He explains that from the late 1950s, political leftism caused a serious violation of citizens' basic rights, including religious rights. Learning a lesson from this history, China should no longer implement the 'rule of man' in replacement of the 'rule of law.'<sup>87</sup> Regarding the 'rule of law,' Wang explains further that while the principle of modern law is 'right-based' rather than 'obligation-based,' there has been no specific religious law protecting citizens' religious rights.<sup>88</sup> Meanwhile, it is common that local legislative regulations, rules and conventions set restrictions upon religious organisations and believers, but not upon the government or religious cadres. Wang then asserts there should be not only judicial equality but also equality in legislation.<sup>89</sup> By pointing out the inadequacy of the legislative and judicial systems, Wang appeals for system reform and making religious legislation based on principles of modern law, through which freedom of religious belief should be protected. When the government expresses an intent to change its role from overall administration to general leadership, Wang suggests that the government should function in terms of politics, legislation and general policy, instead of intervening in religious organisations' daily administrative and religious affairs. To Wang, this separation is also supported by the basic principles of Marxism-Leninism.<sup>90</sup>

Apart from a concern for freedom of religious belief, Wang also discusses the place of Christianity in the overall spiritual progress of the socialist cause. Wang believes that Christian ethics and the Christian view of life and values should be

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<sup>87</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Cong Xiandai Faxue Guannian Tan Zongjiao Lifa' [On Religious Legislation from a Modern Law Perspective], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1989), 249.

<sup>88</sup> *Ibid.*, 251-54.

<sup>89</sup> *Ibid.*, 262.

<sup>90</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Bianhou' [The Editor's Notes], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1993), 377.

making contribution to spiritual progress of the socialist cause.<sup>91</sup> However, Wang explains that the spiritual power behind the socialist cause has Communist culture and Communist spirit serving as critical inheritance and inspiration for development of all human culture and spirit. Meanwhile, this spiritual power also includes the following spiritual inheritances: first is a Confucian spirit of ‘dying to preserve virtue and sacrificing to achieve justice’ (*shashen yi chengren, sheshen yi quyì*). The second is a Daoist spirit of ‘the development of things is not aimed at status or remaining the same; therefore, when a mission is accomplished and a context changed, the best choice is retreat’ (*sheng er bu you, wei er bu shi, gong cheng er fu ju*). The third spiritual inheritance is a Puritan Christian’s spirit of diligence and frugality. The fourth is an ancient Chinese heroes’ national spirit. The fifth is the CCP’s spirit of training with Chinese characteristics.<sup>92</sup> Likewise, in discussing ‘mobilising all positive elements’ for spiritual progress, Wang comments that while the Communist ideal, Communist worldview and Communist view of life occupy the unshakable central role, all excellent spiritual heritages in human history are needed. In light of this, both the Buddhist deity Ksitigarbha’s ‘if I do not descend into hell, who will do it?’ and Jesus’ ‘not to be served, but to serve’ are necessary for China’s spiritual progress.<sup>93</sup> Therefore, Wang acknowledges the central role of Communist ideology while admitting the positive values of different spiritual heritages, including Christian spirituality. In Wang’s argument, he places Christianity under the overall socialist cause. In other words, his argument is carried out from a socialist

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<sup>91</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Youguan Zichuan Yanjiu De Jidian Sikao: Shenxue Qunzhong Yundong Zhi Fansi’ [Some Thoughts About Study on Self-Propagating: Reflection on Theological Mass Movement], in *Shi Nian Juju* (1998), 441.

<sup>92</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Zongjiao Shehuixue Zhi Duanxiang’ [Thought on the Sociology of Religion], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1991), 312.

<sup>93</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Bianhou’ [The Editor’s Notes], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1995), 384.

perspective. With this argument, Wang might intend to be ‘politically correct.’ Apart from a socialist perspective, Wang’s broad and inclusive view in his argument also reflects the inclusive characteristics of great Chinese humanistic learning. Therefore, this argument also reveals Wang’s great passion for Chinese culture and how deeply it has influenced him.

While understanding Communist ideology as occupying the central role in the socialist cause, Wang finds it appropriate for Christianity adapt to socialism. However, during the TSPM’s theological reconstruction from the late 1990s when Bishop Ding Guangxun proposed to downplay ‘justification by faith’ as a way of the church’s adaption to socialism,<sup>94</sup> Wang found it necessary to defend the distinctive role of Christianity. He criticises Ding’s way of adaptation as running into the danger of relativism, rationalism and even scepticism.<sup>95</sup> He explains that ‘justification by faith’ does not lead to an emphasis on the opposition between believers and non-believers. Rather, the downplaying of it can only lead to a deemphasis of basic doctrines and the ethical function of Christianity.<sup>96</sup> From a broad perspective, Wang states that religion has a supreme authority of the deity which may prevent people from committing crimes. It is therefore inappropriate to try to disenchant Christianity

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<sup>94</sup> Cf. Ding Guangxun, ‘Tan Jidutu Yige Sixiang Shenchu de Wenti’ [Discussion on An Issue in the Christian’s Deep Thought], in *Ding Guangxun Wenji*, 285-89.

Ding Guangxun, ‘Tiaozheng Zongjiao Guannian de Huhuan’ [A Call for Adjusting Religious Perspective], *Renmin Zhengxieban* [Journal of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference], 4 September 1998.

Ding Guangxun, ‘Laode Shenxue Sixiang Yao Yousuo Tianzheng Yousuo Gengxin’ [Old Theological Thought Needs to be Adjusted and Renewed], *Renmin Zhengxieban* [Journal of the Chinese People’s Political Consultative Conference], 1 March 1999.

Besides these, a number of articles on theological reconstruction have been published in *Chinese Theological Review*, volume 14, 1999, [https://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/sites/default/files/publication\\_pdf/CTR\\_14.pdf](https://www.amityfoundation.org/eng/sites/default/files/publication_pdf/CTR_14.pdf).

<sup>95</sup> Wang, ‘Rujin Changcun de,’ 232.

<sup>96</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Tan Banhao Jiaohui Yu Shenxue Sixiang Jianshe’ [On the Church Running Well and Theological Development], in *Shi Nian Juju* (2002), 464.

by reducing it to an ethical, rational religion or a positive worldview. If it becomes a disenchanted religion, it will lose transcendence and become unable to purify the social ethos.<sup>97</sup> Wang therefore insists that religious ethics can only be required to adapt to socialist ethics and promote its positive functions, rather than being politicised.<sup>98</sup> Wang's defence of 'justification by faith,' Christian ethics and Christianity's transcendence led to his confrontation and conflict with Ding, and this subsequently led to Wang's retirement from the NUTS in 1999. Then in 2006, Wang indicated some concern in his description of religious believers' adaptation to socialism:

In the socialist period, religious believers, based on their own interest, have made adaptive adjustments, which should not be understood as purely pragmatic. Rather, living in the socialist society, they are a result of religious believers' long-term and even painful deep introspection on religion, faith and the spiritual world. It cannot be described by a few words or slogans.<sup>99</sup>

In this statement, Wang clearly expresses his support of religious believers' adaptation to socialism. However, when he says that adaptive adjustments should not be understood as 'purely pragmatic,' he indicates the existence of a pragmatic concern behind religious believers' adaptation to socialism.<sup>100</sup> At the same time, Wang's description of religious believers' long-term and even painful deep introspection implies that adaptation to socialism is not an easy or happy choice. The

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<sup>97</sup> Ibid., 463. Earlier in 1989, Wang explained Christianity's unparalleled functions in comparison to Chinese humanism: a deep mysticism and an extensive salvation, which are the 'other power' (*ta li*) of Jesus that can help and save humankind who by his own power fail to save himself or others. Applying this to contemporary China, Wang mentions the once popular slogan 'serve the people' (*wei renmin fuwu*) and ascribes its failure to the limitations of traditional Chinese ethics and the lack of an intrinsic spiritual power. To Wang, this spiritual power is the 'other power' of Jesus found in Christianity. Wang Weifan, 'Renge Yu Jingshen De Zhaohuan' [A Call for Personality and Spirituality], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1989), 474, 477-78.

<sup>98</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Jidujiao Lunli yu Dangdai Jingshen Chongjian' [Christian Ethics and Contemporary Spiritual Reconstruction], in *Shi Nian Juju* (2006), 319.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 307.

<sup>100</sup> Bao Zhaohui comments that it is possible that Wang had a political and religious opportunistic concern in his support towards Wu Yaozong in the 1950s. Bao, 254.



pain and uneasiness are apparently due to the Communist regime's promoting atheism as state ideology and its frequent oppression of religions. The religious believers' adaptation paves the way for them to legally continue their religious practice with relative freedom, but this comes with the cost of accepting any possible intervention from the CCP, the government, and in the case of Protestants, the TSPM. In the 1980s, Wang emphasised Christian patriotism in serving the nation and society by following the path of the TSPM. But in the mid-2000s, in his defence of Christianity's distinctive role and his struggle with the TSPM's theological reconstruction, Wang indicated his concern and complicated feeling towards Christians' adaptation to socialism.

Apart from his argument for a space for Christianity and Christianity's distinctive role in the socialist cause, Wang also describes Christians' practical contribution to socialist China. He explains that since the early 1980s, many Christians have become passionate for the nation. Their good life, character and work have made a good contribution to the country and for this they have received various awards from the government and civil authorities.<sup>101</sup> According to Wang, these contributions reveal that many Christians are patriotic, moral, and productive in various fields in socialist China.<sup>102</sup> He therefore understands that when freedom of religious belief is protected, the church will be able to promote stability and unity in society and contribute to China's prosperity and the fulfilment of 'four modernisations.' Considering this valuable contribution of the church, Wang argues that religion no longer functions as an opium in socialist China.<sup>103</sup>

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<sup>101</sup> Wang, 'Jidujiao Sishi Nian,' 491-92.

<sup>102</sup> Wang, 'Zongjiao Shehuixue,' 310.

<sup>103</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Chongtan Yopian' [Talk Again about Opium], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1991), 302-03.

### The Church's Relationship with the Society

From his school years, the deep influence of traditional Chinese culture, which has Confucianism as its dominant tradition, generated in Wang a positive view towards society. Wang thus developed a sense of social responsibility even before he became a Christian in his early twenties. However, Wang's response to the patriotic and anti-imperialist campaign, Anti-Rightist Movement, and later the Cultural Revolution was political. When the political context became relatively open in the 1980s, Wang's historical reflection on Chinese Christians' sharing of the suffering of the Chinese people indicates his view of the church's deep involvement in society. Yet, from the 1980s to the early 1990s, Wang's discussions on topics like freedom of religious belief, rule of law and spiritual progress of the socialist cause were also mostly political. It was not until after the mid-1990s when serious social crises arose that Wang expressed an increasing concern towards society.

In 2002, Wang addressed the honesty crisis, which emerged explosively among the masses in the process of developing the so-called socialist market economy. He realised that the reported cases of fraud gave an impression that there was not a field that was free of fraud in society.<sup>104</sup> As someone who highly valued Chinese culture, Wang lamented that the attacks against Confucianism during the May Fourth Movement and later the Cultural Revolution removed Confucian ethics from contemporary Chinese people. Meanwhile, the modern Enlightenment disenchanted Chinese people with their beliefs in either Buddhism or Confucianism. As a consequence, at least two times, 'the animal nature of humanity' overflowed like a flood: once in the 1960s, marked by cruelty, another time beginning in the

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<sup>104</sup> Wang, 'Rujin Changcun de,' 236.

1980s, marked by greed.<sup>105</sup> Wang thus admits that moral decline has become a serious problem in society. From a cultural perspective, Wang's solution is taking back what has been lost or weakened. He believes that the honesty tradition in Chinese culture will still be beneficial to socialist spiritual progress.<sup>106</sup> The Confucian concept of great harmony (*da tong*) will be helpful as it embodies the idea of a harmonious and righteous society for all people.<sup>107</sup> Apart from Chinese moral teaching, Wang suggests a re-emphasis on religion's ethical function, through a biblical message of honesty, in wakening people's moral conscience.<sup>108</sup> In particular, Wang finds helpful Max Weber's idea of the role of Protestant ethics in economic and social development. He believes that Weber's idea of 'calling' behind ordinary work is helpful for Chinese people, Christians and non-Christians alike, to find a right and proper motivation in an economic, social, and spiritual context in which honesty crisis seems to prevail.<sup>109</sup>

Besides religion's ethical function, Wang also emphasises the Christian's prophetic role in the face of social injustice, towards which Wang expresses a heavy feeling and a sense of urgency. In 2004, Wang warned that China has come to a turning point: moving toward justice and righteousness, or continuing the practice of the exchange between power and money, severe social injustice, and winner-take-all injustice or fake justice.<sup>110</sup> Facing such a turning point, Wang refers to an appeal for

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<sup>105</sup> Wang, 'Jidujiao Lunli yu Dangdai,' 313-14.

<sup>106</sup> Wang, 'Rujin Changcun de,' 233.

<sup>107</sup> Wang, 'Jidujiao Lunli yu Dangdai,' 278.

<sup>108</sup> Wang, 'Rujin Changcun de,' 237-39.

<sup>109</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Xinjiao Lunli Yu Xiandai Shehui Fazhan' [Protestant Ethics and Modern Social Development], in *Shi Nian Juju* (2004), 243-51. Cf. Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* trans. Stephen Kalberg (Los Angeles: Roxbury Publishing Company, 2002), 39-50.

<sup>110</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Chuangjian Zhongguo Xinyue Shijingxue zhi Chuyi' [A Humble Opinion on Constructing a Chinese New Testament Hermeneutics], in *Shi Nian Juju* (2004), 195.

social justice as a unique aspect of Hebrew culture as well as ‘Christian culture’ (*jidujiao wenhua*).<sup>111</sup> He asserts that Christianity is a religion of the poor, the suffering, the powerless and the humble, and it must provide people with comfort and be able to touch their heart.<sup>112</sup> Therefore, Wang understands that seeking a fair, just and righteous society is the ‘biggest politics’ in biblical, Jewish and Christian traditions. Departing from it, the church will lose its voice, resulting in theological distress.<sup>113</sup> Nevertheless, Wang expresses a deep disappointment: while society is engulfed in issues like the increasing wealth gap, abuse of public power, the poor’s inability to pay for children’s tuition fees and arrears of wages for migrant workers, little is mentioned about social injustice, even among Christians.<sup>114</sup> Wang felt discontent and ascribed the silence of Christians largely to socialist repression of prophetic voices addressing issues of social injustice.<sup>115</sup>

Wang’s discussions on broad socio-political topics reveal that he supports the church’s close relationship with the state and the society, and actively engages with the socio-political context. When socialism was the dominant official theme, Wang’s engagement was directed to political topics. When moral and social crises arose after the mid-1990s, Wang turned his interest on the church’s ethical function and prophetic role. Although Wang’s interest and focus changed over time, he was constantly concerned about and engaged with the context. In his active engagement,

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<sup>111</sup> Wang, ‘Jidujiao Lunli yu Dangdai,’ 267.

<sup>112</sup> Wang, ‘Chuangjian Zhongguo Xinyue Shijingxue,’ 142-43.

<sup>113</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Shenxue de Pinkun’ [The Distress of Theology], in *Shi Nian Juju* (2005), 526.

<sup>114</sup> Wang, ‘Jidujiao Lunli yu Dangdai,’ 274-77.

<sup>115</sup> Wang Weifan, ‘Zaitan Shiyinglun’ [Talk Again About Adaptation], in *Shi Nian Juju* (2005), 518.

with concern for both Christianity and the socialist cause, Wang was supportive towards the enduring concern of China's move towards modernisation.

#### 4.3 Evaluation

Wang's dominant theological concerns on a unified Chinese church, Chinese culture's role in Chinese theology, and the church's relationship with the state and the society, reveal Wang's various important ideas. These include the right path of the TSPM, unification of the church, advantages of Chinese culture and its role in Chinese theology, Christianity's adaptation to socialism and Christianity's ethical function and prophetic role, etc. It was noted that Chinese culture plays an important role in all of Wang's three dominant concerns. The following sections will evaluate Wang's various concerns and ideas and explain how his understanding of Chinese culture has resulted in a culture-driven socio-political approach.

##### A Unified Chinese church

Wang's proposal for a unified Chinese church has two bases: the development of the Chinese churches under the TSPM and Chinese cultural teaching. Wang's support of the TSPM and his idea of the church's adaptation to socialist China were pushed by his historical view, which is in favour of the CCP, and his theological thought, which understands the world as the garden of Christ. The Chinese churches went through difficult times in various socialist campaigns and movements from the 1950s to the 1970s. But in the 1990s, after two decades of relatively steady development, Wang considered the Chinese churches ready to move towards unification. As for Chinese cultural teaching, both the Daoist homogeneous view (*qi wu guan*) and the Confucian idea of great harmony (*da tong*) contributed to Wang's idea of a unified Chinese church. Wang proposed a unified Chinese church

in the 1990s, but this idea might have risen much earlier, perhaps in the 1950s. When the CCP brought about a new China in the 1950s, the establishment of the TSPM and realisation of post-denominational unified worship services among many Protestants might have influenced Wang to think of church unification. Since Wang was nurtured by traditional Chinese culture since his early school years, the idea of a unified Chinese church had a firm basis and it might have been conceived as early as the 1950s.

Nevertheless, Wang experienced frustration when he encountered conflicts with TSPM leaders like Bishop Ding Guangxun during the theological reconstruction of the late 1990s. The controversy and dismissal of some TSPM Evangelicals, including Wang himself, during this time was a serious discouragement to Wang's idea of church unification. Furthermore, the TSPM that he supported was led by modernists or liberals and restricted by the government so that the cultural teaching that he appreciated may not have been considered by other Christians. After the theological reconstruction, Wang's idea of church unification remained as a struggle. However, so long as Wang supported the TSPM and appreciated Chinese culture in his lifetime, he seemed to hold on to the aspiration to a unified Chinese church.

#### A Chinese theology

Wang's view of a Chinese theology takes a cultural approach in the sense that he understands it as an integration between Christianity and Chinese culture. Wang takes seriously traditional Chinese culture as a significant Chinese heritage. His high regard towards the role of traditional Chinese culture in developing a Chinese theology is valuable in the sense that, as Wang comments, traditional Chinese culture still exists in contemporary Chinese people's 'cultural psychology.' Similar to

Wang's view, Walter H. Slote comments on the continuous influence of Confucianism in modern China: 'the substance of Confucianism, particularly in terms of interpersonal relationships and ethical values, is still alive and flourishing.'<sup>116</sup> In other words, Confucianism is still a strong background force which influences and navigates contemporary Chinese people's social relationships, their way of life and way of thinking. As Chinese Christians are nurtured by Chinese culture, a Chinese theology with Chinese cultural characteristics has great potential for fruitfulness in China.

Wang's description of the compatibility and advantages of traditional Chinese culture and his explanation of how they can contribute to a Chinese theology may sound appealing to Chinese Christians who hold fast to Chinese culture or a Chinese cultural identity. His thought on great humanistic learning, the noble person Christian, and an ever-generating theology provide great insights for further development of both Chinese culture and Chinese theology. Taking into account characteristics of traditional Chinese culture, Wang's idea of a Chinese theology is significantly different from Western theologies in various aspects. Yet as it addresses a long history and a distinctive Chinese culture and civilisation, it has the potential of making a Chinese contribution to world-wide Christianity and the universal Church.

However, there are also weaknesses in Wang's cultural approach to a Chinese theology. A major weakness is in his spirituality, to which Bao Zhaohui offers a helpful evaluation. Bao sees Wang's spirituality as overemphasising personal experience and feeling. Compared to a Roman Catholic church tradition of

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<sup>116</sup> Walter H. Slote, 'Psychocultural Dynamics within the Confucian Family,' in *Confucianism and the family*, eds. Walter H. Slote and George A. De Vos (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 38.

contemplation, which includes six phases: stillness, gazing, passively waiting, listening, understanding and receiving, Wang's contemplation often lacks the step of gazing. Reading from Wang's *Moxiang Ji (Collection of Meditations)*, Bao observes that Wang has a tendency to skip gazing and passively waiting and listening, and he jumps into understanding and receiving too early. The result is that Wang's spirituality also expresses a feeling of life too early. In this case, the Bible is weakened while personal experience and feelings are emphasised, and the Bible serves only as a means to stir up personal inspiration.<sup>117</sup> In line with this, Bao comments that Wang's spirituality lacks a spirit of formal rationality as he emphasises doing and experiencing in great Chinese humanistic learning. While being occupied by an interest in his personal feeling and experience, Wang does not pay enough attention on the issue itself.<sup>118</sup> Corresponding to Bao's comment, an instance can be observed from Wang's mention of Yu Youren (1879-1964), who was buried on the Yangming mountain of Taipei, Taiwan. Wang states that Yu's spirit must still be watching mainland China, watching his hometown San Yuan.<sup>119</sup> Wang here expresses a strong poetic sentiment of missing one's homeland.<sup>120</sup> However, in mentioning a dead Christian missing his homeland, Wang totally ignores Christian teaching about where the spirit of the dead in Christ will go and stay. With this weakness, Christians who take a cultural approach of doing Chinese theology may

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<sup>117</sup> Bao, 255-56.

<sup>118</sup> Bao comments that a Confucian noble person style of spirituality is still common among many contemporary Chinese Christians. Ibid., 258-60.

<sup>119</sup> Yu Youren was a modern Chinese politician, educator and calligrapher, who held a high-ranking post in the Nationalist government. Yu was also the founder and principal in several universities in China. Wang Weifan, 'Shende Meiyi' [God's Good Will], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1993), 608.

<sup>120</sup> Wang himself is a poet. He composes his first poem at the age of 17 when he was not yet a Christian. In this first poem, he expresses a heroic sentiment as he portrays a hero who is meant to be traveling to far places.



run into a danger of following their cultural sentiments or personal feelings, lacking proper reasoning, and consciously or unconsciously, ignoring Christian doctrines. Therefore, a cultural passion for doing, experiencing, feeling and harmony, plus Wang's own poetic sentiment, may result in weak theology when these passions are over-emphasised or become the sole concern of doing theology. Likewise, when Chinese theologians draw from traditional Chinese culture as their source and inspiration, Chinese theology may develop distinctive Chinese features but at the same time lack something like rationality. When Chinese theologians value great humanistic learning as opposed to Western style rational learning, they may achieve a status of 'inward sagehood and outward kingship' (*nei sheng wai wang*), but their theological thinking may lack serious rationality and proper reasoning.

Another weakness in Wang's spirituality, as Bao explains, is emphasising harmony and avoiding confrontation. Bao comments that while confrontation, struggle and conflict objectively exist, they are rarely, if ever, seen in Wang's writing.<sup>121</sup> This makes sense as Wang highly values the Confucian concept of harmony. It is true that Wang in his writing does not mention or discuss the dark side of traditional Chinese culture, the fate of the unsaved, or the contradiction between Christianity and Communism. This kind of absence usually leads to an unbalanced or unfair discussion in Chinese theology and a failure to deal with certain issues or present a holistic picture. However, Bao's comment does not describe Wang's whole endeavour. Although it was uncommon, Wang did confront conflict in situations like the theological reconstruction movement. His struggle and confrontation in this

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<sup>121</sup> Bao, 258.

situation were due to his Evangelical stand, which would not allow him to accommodate the liberal argument of downplaying justification by faith.

Apart from the above-mentioned weaknesses, Wang's advocacy of a Chinese theology wed to an elitist form of Chinese culture leaves little room for the participation of common Christians who do not possess a high cultural level. His interest in ancient Chinese classics may find little appreciation among Chinese people, including those fairly educated, who do not read or cannot easily understand ancient classics in their busy life in contemporary society. Thus, while there may be few Christians who possess the cultural qualities as described by Wang, defining the noble person Christian as the practitioner of Chinese theology is simply an obvious limitation in Wang's view of a Chinese theology. To conclude, Wang deeply appreciates traditional Chinese culture and highly regards its role in Chinese theology, but it is in his cultural passion that Wang also exposes weaknesses and limitations in taking a cultural approach to Chinese theology.

#### A Culture-Driven Socio-Political Approach

From his early participation in the church in the 1950s and across his lifetime, Wang constantly supported the TSPM and adapted to socialist China. In other words, Wang constantly held an active engaging approach towards the socio-political context. His constant engagement may due to several reasons. First, historically, Wang understood the CCP as the party that led China and Chinese people into independence from foreign powers and freedom from the corrupted rule of the Nationalist Party. Secondly, Wang found common ground between a 'righteous socialist China,' as he observed it, and his theological ideas like the world is the garden of Christ, the Lord of the cosmos and the Lord of history. Thirdly, Wang was

passionate about traditional Chinese culture, especially Confucianism, which urges a positive attitude toward entering the world (*ru shi*).

Among these reasons, the first two significantly weakened after the mid-1990s as Wang was dismissed and retired from NUTS due to his conflict with Bishop Ding Guangxun during the theological reconstruction. He developed an increasing concern in the face of serious moral and social crises. It seems that Wang's assessment of the socialist state and the Chinese society might have shifted after the mid-1990s. Before his retirement in 1999, Wang had a more positive view towards the state and the society. In the 1980s, he commented that 'there has not been a liberation theology in China because the liberated Chinese society, although still having weaknesses which need to be overcome, is in its essence willing to pursue God-required justice and righteousness. This makes China different from countries in Latin America.'<sup>122</sup> Wang's words echo Bishop Ding Guangxun, who also claims that the Chinese church no longer needs liberation theology because liberation has already been achieved in China beginning in 1949.<sup>123</sup> However, when the theological reconstruction started in the late 1990s, Wang struggled to defend Evangelical doctrines and felt frustrated about the movement. In the midst of his struggle, Wang discussed little on political theories like Marxism, Communism, and Mao Zedong thought, which he liked to discuss before his retirement. Meanwhile, Wang became increasingly concerned about moral decline and social injustice. This indicates that his perception of the state and society might have turned generally negative, although he continued to support the TSPM and the Communist regime.

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<sup>122</sup> Wang, 'Jiaohui de Shengjing Guan,' 455.

<sup>123</sup> Ding Guangxun, 'Inspirations from Liberation Theology, Process Theology and Teilhard de Chardin,' in *Love Never Ends* (Nanjing: Yilin Press, 2000), 199.

Then in 2005, when Wang discussed ‘the distress of theology’ (*shenxue de pinkun*), he indicated that the Chinese church needs to learn from many theological sources, and one source is Latin American liberation theology.<sup>124</sup> This clearly contrasts with what he said about liberation theology in the 1980s. Wang obviously realised the seriousness of moral decline and social injustice after the mid-1990s. From his criticisms against the TSPM, struggles with modernists like Bishop Ding and concerns about social crises after his retirement, it is clear that Wang realised the downside and mistakes of the TSPM, the CCP and socialist China.

When the first two reasons weakened, it was primarily because of the third reason that Wang continued his active engagement with the socio-political context, seemingly to continue to support the TSPM and the regime. Wang finds Chinese culture, especially Confucianism, as not only a crucial element in developing a Chinese theology but also a strong reason for socio-political engagement. This is true because Confucianism itself encourages an active attitude of entering the world. As the New Confucian scholar Tu Wei-Ming states, Confucianism is ‘a social ethic, a political ideology, a scholarly tradition, and a way of life.’<sup>125</sup> When Confucianism encourages socio-political engagement, Wang consciously takes on a clear cultural identity for himself. Bao Zhaohui comments that Wang in his self-identifying Chinese moral and cultural identity considers himself a noble person in the Confucian style.<sup>126</sup> Accordingly, Wang’s strong interest in social progress and social

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<sup>124</sup> Wang comments that the sources of Chinese theology include traditional Chinese culture, the old generation of Chinese theologians since the May Fourth Movement, Neo-orthodox theology, liberation theology from Latin America, reconciliation from South Africa and the value system and methodology of Marxism. If one does not take an interest in nation and society and discards these theological sources, doing theology in ivory tower, the outcome will be basically fruitless theology. Wang, ‘Shenxue de Pinkun,’ 527.

<sup>125</sup> Tu Wei-Ming, ‘Confucius and Confucianism,’ in *Confucianism and the Family*, eds. Walter H. Stole, and George A. De Vos. (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 3.

<sup>126</sup> Bao, 252.

justice is related to his Confucian sentiment.<sup>127</sup> Perhaps, Wang's interpretation of a few prominent Christians' relevant ideas can reveal how he understands the role of Confucianism, or Chinese culture in general, in socio-political engagement. For instance, Wang endorses Xie Fuya's idea that the essential Chinese orthodoxy is meliorism, which holds the view that the world as well as society may naturally remain on their own, but can be improved through human effort.<sup>128</sup> Wang asserts that this Chinese meliorism, as well as Bishop Ding Guangxun's view of a combination of 'calm detachment and enthusiastic participation,'<sup>129</sup> are originated from the Confucian moral concept of 'taking the responsibility of the world' (*yi tianxia wei jiren*).<sup>130</sup> As it is of morality, Wang views this Confucian teaching as an obligation of the Christian, especially the noble person Christian, towards his or her nation. It should be highlighted that Wang understands this Confucian teaching as the origin of Xie's meliorism and Ding's theology. While Xie and Ding may or may not think in the same way, this is Wang's view.

Likewise, Wang holds a similar view of other two figures. He understands Wu Yaozong's theology during the 1950s, including major themes like acknowledging the value of humanity and the world, God's mighty intervention in human history, and the dedication to serve society, as a way of inheriting Christian doctrines and creating new meaning in adaptation to socialist China. Interestingly, Wang interprets this theological path of Wu as having its roots from the traditional Chinese cultural concept of 'every man has a duty for his country' (*tianxia*

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<sup>127</sup> Ibid., 254.

<sup>128</sup> Xie Fuya, 'Lishi Zonghe Shiqi-Zhonghua Jidujiao yu Mingri Shijie' [A Comprehensive Time in History-Chinese Christianity and Tomorrow's World], in *Ju Liu Diandi*, 250.

<sup>129</sup> Ding Guangxun, 'Zhongguo de Shenxue Qunzhong Yundong' [The Mass Theological Movement in China] in *Ding Guangxun Wenji*, 32.

<sup>130</sup> Wang, 'Qiancheng Pian,' 139-140.

*xingwang, pifu youze*).<sup>131</sup> Wang also mentions the Evangelical theologian Jia Yuming who holds a view of both waiting for Christ's second coming and 'taking trouble to serve people, serving people as serving the Lord.' Wang interprets Jia's view as based on traditional Chinese culture, which emphasises the present world and a way of back-and-forth loop thinking, moving back and forth between this life and the afterlife.<sup>132</sup> In these interpretations, Wang considers Confucianism, or Chinese culture in general, as the origin, the root, or the basis of these Christian figures' active socio-political engagement. As Wang himself is passionate towards Chinese culture, the rich Chinese cultural teachings certainly compel in Wang a sense of moral obligation towards the nation, the state and society. In light of this, Chinese culture, particularly Confucianism, has been the fundamental reason, or fundamental driving force, of Wang's active engagement with the world and society. In other words, in his active socio-political engagement, Wang exercises a culture-driven socio-political approach.

Having identified a passion for Chinese culture as the driving force of Wang's socio-political engagement, it is still necessary to evaluate his engagement. Wang engages with broad socio-political topics in his discussions on the church's relationship with the state and society. However, his discussions are frequently carried out from a perspective of the socialist cause. As a result, when he discusses relevant topics, he mostly employs official terms, theories and ideology, providing suggestions under the overall framework of the socialist cause and the TSPM. It is understandable that as an Evangelical in the TSPM system, Wang might try to be

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<sup>131</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Zhongguo Jiaohui Shenxue Jianshe Zhi Sikao' [Thinking of the Theological Construction of the Chinese Church], in *Ershi Zhai Cangmang* (1992), 498.

<sup>132</sup> Wang, 'Yao Jianli Ju Zhongguo Tese de,' 542.

politically correct, or at least politically tolerable. However, conducting arguments from a socialist perspective may not be effective socio-political engagement. On the one hand, it is questionable if his argument can be heeded by the CCP or influence its view towards Christianity. In fact, he admitted that, on occasions like his struggle with the theological reconstruction, his words were taken lightly because he was an insignificant figure,<sup>133</sup> and he had no platform to dialogue.<sup>134</sup> On the other hand, his discussions on various socio-political topics may have lacked significant influence on the church since many of his arguments are based on either political theories or cultural teachings, instead of being substantially explained by Christian doctrine or biblical teaching.

The present study has showed and discussed Wang's culture-driven socio-political approach and his aspiration to a unified Chinese church and a Chinese theology, which would lead to a truly Chinese Christianity. It will be helpful to understand the value of Wang's theology when he is placed among other Christian figures. From a historical perspective, Wang Xiaojing comments that Wang's experience in the NUTS in the 1950s and his later decades of engagement with the TSPM and society brought significant openness and rationality in his theology. An influence from traditional Chinese culture also made Wang's theological expression different from that of fundamentalists like Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee. Even compared to open Evangelicals like Yang Shaotang and Jia Yuming, Wang has more theological reflection based on the social situation.<sup>135</sup> It is widely known that Wang

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<sup>133</sup> Wang Weifan, 'Ye Tan Zhongguo Makesi Zhuyi Zongjiaoguan De "Shiyinglun"' [Discussion on Chinese Marxist Religious View of Adaptation], in *Shi Nian Juju* (2004), 501.

<sup>134</sup> Wang Weifan, 'You Rong Nai Da: Luo Zufeng Xiansheng Shishi Qi Zhounian Ji' [Capacity Makes Greatness: Remembrance of The Seventh Death Anniversary of Mister Luo Zufeng], in *Shi Nian Juju* (2003), 379.

<sup>135</sup> Wang, 'The Church Unity Movement in Early-Twentieth Century China,' 61.

Mingdao and Lin Xiangao did not indicate interest in transforming the world, society or Chinese culture. They were among those who criticised some of the TSPM leaders as ‘the party of the unbelievers.’ Watchman Nee was ambiguous in his attitude towards the TSPM, but he and his Little Flock were nevertheless oppressed and banned by the Communist regime. Among these Evangelicals, Wang Weifan was the one who constantly held an open view towards the state and the society.

In terms of a passion for Chinese culture and open socio-political engagement, Wang is similar to more open Evangelicals like Jia Yuming and Yang Shaotang, non-Evangelicals like Xie Fuya, the early period Zhao Zichen, and other contemporary cultural Christians who have a passion for Chinese culture and society.<sup>136</sup> Yet, Wang made a difference among the non-Evangelicals and the later cultural Christians because of his Evangelical stand, which was clearly demonstrated through his struggle with the TSPM’s theological reconstruction. Concerning Evangelicals, Jia and Yang did not take Chinese culture as a fundamental driving force for their open socio-political engagement, and they soon failed to cope with the Communist regime after joining the TSPM. Then, among the Evangelicals in the TSPM, Wang was the one who kept going with an open approach and produced the most published writings from the 1950s to the 2000s, therefore presenting an Evangelical voice, but one that could rarely be heard from other Evangelical figures. Wang was perhaps the most socially engaged figure among Evangelicals in his time. He presents a valuable example of how it was possible for an Evangelical in the TSPM system to engage with the socio-political context in socialist China.

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<sup>136</sup> Although Jia Yuming was open to social change and Chinese culture, he was also a fundamentalist in theology.



#### 4.4 Conclusion

As a pastor and scholar with decades-long participation in the TSPM and support of the Communist regime, Wang has been a particular case of the Evangelical's adaptation to the socialist China. He understood the establishment of the PRC and later the TSPM as providing a necessary precondition for the Chinese church's independence from foreign missions. The realisation of Protestants' coming together in unified worship services in the 1950s-early 1960s and their continuation in the 1980s, a cultural sense of homogeneous view and great harmony, and two decades of the Three-Self churches' post-Cultural Revolution development caused Wang to aspire to achieve a unified Chinese church. A unified Chinese church is therefore highly meaningful to Wang in the sense that it indicates: (1) the Chinese church's independence from foreign Christianity, missions and imperialism; (2) the unity of the Chinese church in its adaptation to socialist China; and (3) the value of Chinese cultural teaching.

As an Evangelical deeply influenced by traditional Chinese culture, Wang had a great passion for traditional Chinese culture and highly valued its role in Chinese theology. He advocated a Chinese theology due to the necessity of Christianity's adaptation to Chinese culture. Through discussion on the compatibility and advantages of traditional Chinese culture, Wang's idea of a Chinese theology includes important qualities like great humanistic learning, the noble person Christian, and an ever-generating theology. Wang's Chinese theology thus takes a cultural approach in the sense that Chinese culture plays a significant role and it is to be integrated with Christianity. Having all this in view, Wang aspires to a Chinese

Christianity which consists of a unified Chinese church and a Chinese theology integrated with Chinese culture.

While Wang's idea of a Chinese Christianity is closely tied to the TSPM, socialist China and Chinese culture, he had in view the church's close relationship with the state and the society, therefore proposing an active engagement with the socio-political context in broad terms. Wang's engagement with the socio-political context was based on his historical view, his recognition of the TSPM, the CCP and the socialist China, and his high appreciation of Chinese cultural teaching on moral obligation towards one's nation and society. However, when Wang's view of the state and the society became generally negative due to the TSPM's theological reconstruction and increasing social crises, it was primarily a cultural sense of moral obligation that kept Wang in his active socio-political engagement. Therefore, it is not only that Chinese culture plays a significant role in Wang's idea of a unified Chinese church and a Chinese theology, his active and constant engagement with the socio-political context has also been driven by Chinese cultural teaching. In other words, Wang follows a culture-driven approach of socio-political engagement.



## V. SUN YI'S VISION OF 'A CITY SET ON A HILL'

The previous two chapters have observed Lin Xiangao's privatised faith and an approach of socio-political disengagement turning out as a radical way of engagement, and Wang Weifan's aspiration to a Chinese Christianity and a culture-driven socio-political approach. Although Wang worked within the TSPM system and Lin served as a house church leader, they shared basically the same historical context. They both had early church and ministry experience in the 1940s and the 1950s, went through the Cultural Revolution, and then became significant church leaders, being productive and influential through their writings and ministries after the 1980s. When significant socio-political changes took place, the church leaders who emerged from the 1990s represented a new generation of leadership that have become influential since the 2000s. Dealing with a changing socio-political context, leaders of the new generation respond to their context with new concerns and explore new theological approaches. Among them, Sun Yi, an elder of Beijing Shouwang Church, has been an advocate of seeking openness and integrity (*gongkai zhengti xing*) of the church, from which Sun envisions the church as 'a city set on a hill,' which cannot be hidden but will bring impact in the wider society.

### 5.1 Profile of Sun Yi

Sun Yi is a PhD graduate from Peking University (2001), majored in philosophy, and previously worked as an associate professor at the school of philosophy, Renmin University of China. His research areas include New Testament

theology, Reformation and modern Christian theology. Sun has published his PhD thesis, *The Single Individual: On Kierkegaard's Religious Thought*<sup>1</sup> and the book, *Introduction to the Bible*.<sup>2</sup> He is a co-editor of the book, *John Calvin and Sino-Christian Theology*<sup>3</sup> and author of dozens of journal articles on philosophy and theology. He has also translated a few theological books into the Chinese language. As a visiting scholar, Sun has conducted research at Regent College (Canada), the University of Helsinki (Finland), Calvin College (the United States), and the Chinese University of Hong Kong.<sup>4</sup>

Sun Yi has been an academician in philosophy, religion and Christianity. However, rather than being a 'cultural Christian,' Sun has been a Christian scholar and a church leader after he became deeply involved in Shouwang church, founded by pastor Jin Tianming, a graduate from Tsinghua University, in Jin's home in Beijing, 1993.<sup>5</sup> At its early stage, the majority of Shouwang's members were intellectuals. The church experienced steady growth from the beginning, and it had multiple fellowships from 2002. Jin was ordained as the pastor in 2002 by Xie Moshan (also known as Moses Xie), and Sun and another member were elected as

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<sup>1</sup> Sun Yi, *Geti De Ren: Qikeguo De Jidujiao Shengcunlun Sixiang* [*The Single Individual: On Kierkegaard's Religious Thought*] (Beijing: China Social Sciences Press, 2004).

<sup>2</sup> Sun Yi, *Shengjing Daodu* [*Introduction to the Bible*] (Beijing: China Renmin University Press, 2005).

<sup>3</sup> Sun Yi and Chen Zuoren, eds., *Jiaerwen Yu Hanyu Shenxue* [*John Calvin and Sino-Christian Theology*] (Hong Kong: Institute of Sino-Christian Studies Ltd., 2010).

<sup>4</sup> For further biographical details of Sun Yi, see Chow, *Chinese Public Theology*, 171. See also 'Sun Yi', Institute of Buddhism and Religious Studies, Renmin University of China, accessed 11 November 2019, <http://isbrt.ruc.edu.cn/index.php?type=yanjiurennyuanview&id=2476>.

<sup>5</sup> Calida Chu suggests that Sun Yi should be classified as a Christian scholar, based on the Hong Kong theologian Milton Wan's typology of Sino-Christian theologians, which include (1) scholars in mainland China studying Christianity, (2) cultural Christian studies scholars, and (3) Christian scholars. Calida Chu, 'The Dilemma of Church and State in the Twenty-First Century China: A Study of Sun Yi's Sino-Christian Theology' (course paper, University of Edinburgh, 2017). Cf. Milton Wan, 'Hanyu Shenxue de Gonggongxing—Lun Shenxue Yanjiu yu Jidu Zongjiao Jingyan' [*The Public Nature of Sino-Christian Theology: On Theological Studies and Christian Experience*], *Jidu Zongjiao Yanjiu* [*Study of Christianity*], no. 11 (2008): 49.

elders in 2003. In 2005, Shouwang church had around 300 members meeting in 12-13 house fellowships. In that year, the church started formulating church regulations and beliefs, transforming from multiple house fellowships to one single church with an integrated congregation. Meanwhile, Shouwang's leaders shared a church vision of 'a city on a hill, a light to the world' (*shanshang de cheng, shishang de guang*). At its peak, Shouwang church had over a thousand members. Therefore, it became one of the largest urban house churches in China.

Nevertheless, Shouwang church's development was severely stalled when it constantly encountered conflict with local authorities. The conflict started in 2006 when the church's application to register as an independent religious organisation was rejected by various levels of governmental and religious authorities on the basis that Shouwang church's pastor was not recognised by the local state-sanctioned Protestant association, namely, the local TSPM. The church then went through oppression by local authorities from time to time. Starting from October 2009, the church had to conduct Sunday services outdoors because they were not able to rent a venue due to government's intervention. Then on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2011, the detention of over a hundred Shouwang members and the house arrest of church leaders, including Sun, revealed the government's determination to shut down the church, which then had difficulty conducting outdoor Sunday services. From late 2014, the number of attending or trying to attend outdoor Sunday services significantly dropped to a handful, then from early 2016, only on rare occasions one or two members attempted for outdoor Sunday services. However, Shouwang's leaders insist that they will not return to their former way of scattered house fellowships. Instead, they have their Sunday sermons and programs recorded and

uploaded on the church website. Although its membership has been declining, Shouwang's leaders, including Sun Yi as a core leader who went through the difficult times of Shouwang, keep their vision for the church.<sup>6</sup>

## 5.2 Sun's Theology

Sun did his PhD thesis on Kierkegaard's religious thought, yet that was a time when he considered himself a cultural Christian.<sup>7</sup> In later years after he got involved in church life, Sun became well known for his theological reflections on ecclesiology and the development of Shouwang church. As Sun's theological reflections focus on the openness and integrity of the church, the following sections will explore his vision of the church as 'a city set on a hill,' his view of Christian spirituality with a public dimension, and his approach of constructive dialogue as an attempt of gaining a platform for public engagement.

### 5.2.1 A City Set on a Hill

Taking from Matthew 5:14 'You are the light of the world. A city set on a hill cannot be hidden,' Sun states that the vision of Shouwang church is to be 'a city set on a hill' (*shanshang zhi cheng*). According to Sun, this vision has two dimensions: (1) integrity, or formation of the church, which includes the Christian life and church polity; (2) openness, or the public nature of the church, which refers to making the church public to society through its open witness and public engagement in various socio-political areas.<sup>8</sup>

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<sup>6</sup> For a record of Shouwang church events, see 'Beijing Shouwang Jiaohui Dashiji' [A Record of Beijing Shouwang Church Events], @ *Shouwang* 55, (October 2013): 6-9.

<sup>7</sup> Chow, *Chinese Public Theology*, 109.

<sup>8</sup> Sun Yi, 'Zuo Shanshang de Cheng' [Being A City Set on A Hill], @ *Shouwang* 55, (January 2013): 44-45.

### Integrity of the Church

Regarding the first dimension, integrity or formation of the church, Sun realises the uniqueness of the church and emphasises the church being church, which is also emphasised by Lin Xiangao. Like Lin, Sun insists that Christ is the foundation and the head of the church, and the church should follow Christ as well as the Apostolic tradition. While sharing this conviction with Lin, Sun has two other emphases that can better reflect his context. The first emphasis is on the sociality (*shequn xing*) of the church over the individuality of church members. Based on biblical narratives in both the Old and the New Testaments, Sun asserts that God's covenant is made with a people group rather than individuals who then spontaneously form a group. Therefore, 'God's covenant with the chosen people transcends all individuals in all times. Individuals become part of the covenant by joining the chosen people in his or her time. It is only by this joining that individuals can enjoy and experience the status and blessing under the covenant.'<sup>9</sup> This joining should be verified by the individual's commitment to a particular visible church, in which the growth of the Christian faith and life take place. Contrary to an emphasis on the individual's personal relationship with God, Sun insists that it is the covenant people's relationship with God that determines the inter-relationship among church members forming the integrity of the church.<sup>10</sup> Sun interprets Matthew 5:14 as referring to collective witness of the church rather than individual witness.<sup>11</sup> In his discussion on Stanley Hauerwas's various arguments in the book, *Resident Aliens: Life in the Christian Colony*, Sun explains the importance of the Christian

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<sup>9</sup> Sun Yi, 'Dui Jiaohui Shequnxing de Sikao' [Reflection on the Sociality of the Church], *Xing Hua* [*Almond Flowers*] 1, no. 1 (July 2007): 29.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>11</sup> Sun, 'Zuo Shanshang,' 46.



community and its witness to the world—a Christian individual may be able to serve as a torch, but it is the church community that can shine as a city set on a hill. It is this community that brings significant impact on society.<sup>12</sup>

Sun's second emphasis is on the construction of a proper church polity. Sun acknowledges that a proper church order develops from the Christian's wholehearted obedience and the interrelations between members of the church, and obedience has been a spiritual virtue among house churches. However, Sun perceives that obedience has not been fostered or made stable by a proper church order system. He explains that obedience needs to be outwardly manifested, being maintained or encouraged through a church order system. This system includes church regulations, discipline and beliefs, a pastoral model, an administrative model and ministry model, a collective leadership and participatory services. All these are features of an institutionalised church. Regarding institutionalisation, Sun explains,

Institutionalisation aims to provide boundaries or cooperative model for team service. Its real function is to foster every participating co-worker or church member's willingness towards obedience. It is not for an impersonal system, but to encourage mutual obedience and support among church members. Yet this is not the real purpose of a church order system. Its real purpose is to manifest the sovereignty and the will of God in the church community.<sup>13</sup>

Sun explains further that a proper church order system will help to refrain temporal individual wishes or enthusiasm and keep God's will and guidance for the church community.<sup>14</sup> Therefore, Sun understands institutionalisation as a necessary means of growing in maturity and integrity of the church.

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid., 47-48. Cf. Sun Yi, 'Zai Yixiang Zhi Di Tuohuang de Tuant: Du *Yixiangke* Yougan' [A Group Pioneering in Foreign Lands: Review on *Resident Aliens*], *Xing Hua* [*Almond Flowers*] 24, no. 3 (Autumn and Winter 2013): 84-90.

<sup>13</sup> Sun Yi, 'Shi Jiaohui Chengwei Jiaohui' [Let the Church Be Church], @ *Shouwang* 50, (June 2013): 56.

<sup>14</sup> Ibid.

Carsten Vala comments that Shouwang church has made significant achievement in its move towards institutionalisation. The church's powerful pastor and a supportive leadership team share the same vision for church institutionalisation. Strict membership requirements, formal leadership selection process, regularised procedures for conflict resolution and effective congregational communication all make Shouwang a highly institutionalised church.<sup>15</sup> An institutionalised structure helps the church to be integrated and effective in ministry. Vala explains that it is one of the factors that contribute to Shouwang's persistence in holding to its vision. In particular, it helps the church to sustain outdoor Sunday services despite oppression from the government, and it is also what makes Shouwang church different from traditional house churches.<sup>16</sup> An institutionalised structure indeed helps Shouwang church to develop and sustain its vision and ministry.

While Shouwang church has been an example of church institutionalisation, it is worth noting that Sun's inclination towards institutionalism was not seen among indigenous church leaders in the past. Early in the 1920s, Watchman Nee started his loosely connected church movement called the Little Flock, which soon developed into one of the largest church networks before 1949. Nee claimed to follow the church model described in Acts, based on which Nee insisted that there should be only one local church in a geographical region.<sup>17</sup> Therefore, the Little Flock had no leadership hierarchy structure in the local church, nor hierarchy leadership beyond

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<sup>15</sup> Vala, 175-76, 186-88, 190.

<sup>16</sup> Vala explains Shanghai Wanbang Church as an example of a traditional house church, which had loose structure, lacked a vision of socio-political engagement, and rapidly collapsed when banned by Shanghai local authorities in 2009. *Ibid.*, 161-67.

<sup>17</sup> Alexander Chow explains that Nee shifted from an 'Antioch model' to a 'Jerusalem model.' Chow, *Theosis*, 55-58.

the local church. With the absence of church hierarchy, Nee kept the Little Flock as an indigenous Chinese church while criticising Western denominationalism. In all his ideas and practice, Nee rejected institutionalisation of the church.

After the CCP's takeover of China in 1949, church institutionalisation took on a new form. With the establishment of the TSPM, some Protestant leaders claimed that Chinese Protestants had moved into a post-denominational era, in which there was no longer denominational distinction. All Protestant (registered) churches were unified under the leadership of the TSPM and later together with the China Christian Council as *lianghui*. In this way, the TSPM promotes its own institutionalised structure, through which Protestants are supposed to support the CCP's united front policy and cooperate with the Communist regime to expel Western imperialism and foreign Christian influence. However, the TSPM's form of institutionalisation has been resisted by many unregistered house church Christians who, mostly conservative in theology, rejected the TSPM and refused to cooperate with the CCP's religious policy. As Lin Xiangao commented, the unity under the TSPM is achieved by coercion with indifference.<sup>18</sup>

The TSPM adopted a form of unified institutionalisation, and unregistered house churches had been loosely organised. In the 1980s, cultural Christians emerged and developed their view towards institutionalism. Liu Xiaofeng, one of the pioneering cultural Christians, borrows from Ernst Troeltsch's three forms of the Christian church: the Church, the Sects, and the Mystical church. Liu describes the TSPM as the Church, or 'Big Church' in Chinese (*da jiaohui*), which actively adapts to the world and tries to cooperate with the secular powers. House churches are

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<sup>18</sup> Lin, *Zongpai Yu Heyi*, 39.

interpreted by Liu as the Sects, which focuses on personal experience of faith and tries to break with the world. Unlike these two types, Liu describes cultural Christians as the Mystical church, which usually consists of the educated who prefer an individualistic style of religious life and do not connect with any church community. Liu favours the Mystical church in the sense that cultural Christians have been a new phenomenon from the 1980s, and Liu is optimistic that they can develop a cultural Christianity in China.<sup>19</sup> With this optimism, Liu rejects the idea of church institutionalisation, which may hinder the development of cultural Christians and a cultural Christianity in China. It is noted that Sun Yi was a cultural Christian in his years of PhD studies. As his PhD research was on Kierkegaard's religious thought, Sun, like Liu Xiaofeng, was not involved in any local church life at that time. Nevertheless, after he became involved in church life and was elected as a church elder, he distanced himself from that past by studying Calvinism and promoting Shouwang church's institutionalisation.

### Openness of the Church

For the second dimension of Sun's vision, openness or the public nature of the church, Sun draws attention to the history of the church as an evidence of the church's openness. He explains that Christians' meeting in secret places, usually due to oppression, has only existed in short periods. It has not been the normal status of the church existing in the world. Instead, being open and accessible to the public has been a long tradition of the universal Church whenever there is no hindrance or

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<sup>19</sup> Tan Xing, 'Guanyu Dangdai Zhongguo Dalu "Wenhua" Jidujiao de Shenxue Pingzhu' [Theological Commentary about 'Cultural' Christianity in Contemporary Mainland China], *Tripod*, no. 6 (1990): 7-9.

oppression from the world.<sup>20</sup> Sun implies that churches should be open to the world in the present time in China. Particularly, Sun asserts that Shouwang church should bear ‘open and integrated witness’ (*gongkai zhengti de jianzheng*) for Christ in society. As the church is an integrated and distinctive community, its members’ collective witness for Christ is accessible and openly seen by the world through the church members’ love, their good deeds and gospel preaching.<sup>21</sup> When other people groups in society follow the ways of the world like mammonism, disorder and dishonesty, they will see in the church a different community life which, through a collective witness for Christ, manifests the presence of the kingdom of God in the world.<sup>22</sup>

Sun understands the church’s openness refers to not only the church’s collective witness for Christ but also its interaction with the wider society. Sun’s rationale behind such interaction is the ‘common grace’ of God, which is extended to the whole universe. Sun explains that salvation in Christ, which is God’s special grace, is not just for Christians as individuals but also for their inter-relationship with one another and with the cosmos.<sup>23</sup> This extended effect of God’s salvation, together with His creation, reveal the integrity of the covenant people and their open relationship with the whole universe. In line with this, Sun states,

The Church must have received simultaneously the Great Commission and the commandment of loving one’s neighbour as oneself. They both are the responsibilities of the Church. Although the two should not be separated, loving one’s needy neighbours is not merely a means of evangelising them. That is not the case because love from Christ has a purpose in itself. In this

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<sup>20</sup> Sun Yi, ‘Guanyu Jihui Xingshi de Wenda’ [Questions and Answers About the Forms of Church Services], *Shouwang Wangluo Qikan* [*Shouwang Online Journal*] 9, (September 2011): 21.

<sup>21</sup> Sun Yi, ‘Shanshang Zhi Cheng dui Shenguo de Zhangxian’ [Manifestation of the Kingdom of God Through A City Set on A Hill], *Xing Hua* [*Almond Flowers*] 18, no. 4 (Winter 2011): 20.

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 23.

<sup>23</sup> Sun, ‘Dui Jiaohui Shequnxing,’ 30-31.

sense, the Church's mission and responsibility should not be reduced to merely spreading the Gospel to the nations.<sup>24</sup>

Sun explains further that Christian values and lifestyle may not cause people's conversion to the Christian faith. Yet before people receive the best blessing, which is the Gospel, they can at least receive blessings of various kinds by God's common grace.<sup>25</sup> In other words, without being converted to Christianity, people in the world still benefit from Christians' love and good deeds since they bring forth the common grace of God.

In view of Sun being influenced by Calvinism, his explanation of common grace seems to be drawn from Neo-Calvinism as described by Dutch Neo-Calvinists such as Abraham Kuyper.<sup>26</sup> Related to the concept of common grace, Sun discusses the church's 'cultural mandate,' which is also a Neo-Calvinist concept referring to the church's responsibility of taking care of God's creation.<sup>27</sup> While the cultural mandate generally covers creation as a whole, Sun's interest is the church's responsibility towards society. He notes that unlike the generation in the 1920s-40s, perhaps referring to figures such as Wang Mingdao and John Sung, the current generation of Chinese Christianity has an expanded view of a 'dual identity' of the church: it is a community of faith, called by God, at the same time a visible, organised social group of people living in the present world. In terms of the church being a social group, Sun explains,

The church community shares with other social groups, including the government (if we define it as a group in social life), a certain degree of commonality in terms of an organised model and basic moral rules. From a

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<sup>24</sup> Sun Yi, 'Jidutu De Shehui Zeren' [The Christian's Social Responsibilities to Society], @ *Shouwang* 51, (July 2013): 13-14.

<sup>25</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>26</sup> Abraham Kuyper, *Calvinism: Six Stone Foundation Lectures* (California: Scotts Valley, 2009), 92-97.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 101.

theological point of view, they are all in the realm of God's common grace. Therefore, the church's practices, such as a democratic system and high moral standards, can be good models for other social groups to follow.<sup>28</sup>

Sun elaborates further that an institutionalised urban house church with openness and integrity can bring a positive impact on society in several areas: (1) once the church becomes open, it will be visible to people who otherwise do not know about the church or Christianity; (2) when the church becomes a legally independent religious organisation without joining the TSPM, it will affect the current pattern of church-state relation and the legalisation of non-government organisations (NGOs); (3) proper institutionalisation of urban house churches can provide a model of autonomy for other social organisations; (4) practice of church discipline will foster a distinct community life, which can help reconstructing ethics in a society suffering from serious moral decline; (5) a larger and integrated church with more resources can offer stable and regular social services to local communities.<sup>29</sup> Sun thus believes that urban house churches can make great contribution to society by setting up a model of moral integrity and organisational integrity through the church's institutionalisation.

Sun's description of the commonality and correlation between the church and other social groups echoes Abraham Kuyper's understanding of the variety of spheres and 'sphere sovereignty.' According to Kuyper, each sphere in social life has its own sovereignty and sacred autonomy. They are equally divine in origin and should be mutually respected. Therefore, all the other spheres shall not 'be coerced to suit itself to the grace of the government.'<sup>30</sup> Compared to Kuyper, Sun does not

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<sup>28</sup> Sun Yi, 'Jidujiao Jiuguo Qingjie Dui Jiaohuiguan De Yingxiang' [The Influence of Christianity's Sentiment of National Salvation Upon Ecclesiology], *Xing Hua* [*Almond Flowers*] 21, no. 3 (Winter 2012): 39.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 38-39.

<sup>30</sup> Kuyper, 75.

explicitly claim sphere sovereignty for the church, given the context that house churches are not legally recognised by the Communist regime. Nevertheless, by explaining the commonality and correlation between the church and other social groups, including the government, Sun does intend to assert the value and legitimacy of the church in society and imply the church's own right in the religious sphere.

### A Response to the Context

Sun explains Shouwang church's integrity and openness from various ecclesiastical and theological perspectives. Yet, Sun also understands the church's move towards openness and integrity as a response to the socio-political context. As a Christian scholar, Sun acknowledges Chinese intellectuals' sentiment of national salvation (*jiuguo qingjie*), which has existed for over a hundred years because of China's constant crises. Sun explains that this sentiment was culture-oriented in the 1920s. It was expressed in a way typical of Evangelical church leaders like Watchman Nee in his quest to become independent from Western churches and their denominationalism. However, starting from the late 1990s, both 'cultural Christians' and intellectual Christians in the church have moved to a society-oriented concern, by which they realise that the reconstruction of the Chinese society, including its religion, morality, rule of law and political system, is still the responsibility of every Chinese, including the Christian.<sup>31</sup> In presenting this understanding, Sun, as a Christian intellectual, indicates his support for the century-long concern of China's move towards modernisation.

As Sun refers to this society-oriented concern as starting from the late 1990s, he reflects on a context which is significantly different from the context of Lin

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<sup>31</sup> Sun, 'Jidujiao Jiuguo Qingjie,' 37-38.



Xiangao and Wang Weifan in the 1980s and the early 1990s. Generally speaking, Sun observes moral decline as the major public concern in his generation. Sun observes that the Chinese people are experiencing an overturning of the value system. They are living in a society in which they disrespect one another's life.<sup>32</sup> Evil has become a common topic of daily life among ordinary people and they are 'poisoning one another and blaming one another.'<sup>33</sup> In a context of serious moral decline, many Christians feel the shift of the spiritual battleground: from a conflict of the church against the state to perseverance in holiness against immorality. In the words of Brent Fulton, 'the struggle is essentially a battle for the spiritual vitality and purity of the church over and against the forces of materialism, secularism, and moral decline.'<sup>34</sup> As a China watcher, Fulton explains that many urban Christians have come to realise their cultural mandate and social responsibility in recent years. A trend of 'into the light,' which sees the necessity for the church to witness for Christ and bring impact in society, has been rising among urban Christians.<sup>35</sup> In a time of moral decline and faith crisis, it is believed that if the church can fill up the empty space left by the decline of Communist ideology, it will be seen as relevant and having legitimacy in social and political life.<sup>36</sup> Discerning the moral crisis in society and the church's potential of social impact, Sun believes that a basic trend of

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<sup>32</sup> Sun Yi, 'Jingwei Shangdi Caineng Zunzhong Shengming' [Fearing God then One Can Respect Life], *Shouwang Wangluo Qikan* [Shouwang Online Journal] 29, (July 2012): 40.

<sup>33</sup> Sun Yi, 'Miandui Shishang de Xie E' [Facing Evil in the World], @ *Shouwang* 53, (August 2013): 33, 35. Likewise, Liu Peng, a researcher in the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences, comments that in a 'crisis of faith,' 'Chinese society has seen an abundance of outrageous and ridiculous phenomena.' Liu Peng, 'The Achilles' Heel of China's Rise: Belief.' <http://www.pacilution.com/english/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=3076>. Quoted in Fulton, 70.

<sup>34</sup> Fulton, 48.

<sup>35</sup> As an example, the mobilisation of Christian volunteers from more than fifteen cities across China for the relief in the Wenchuan earthquake in Sichuan province in 2008 marked the church's moving 'off the sidelines and onto the stage of social engagement.' *Ibid.*, 68.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, 67, 72.

the majority of urban house churches is rising to the surface: becoming an open and integrated church (*gongkai zhengti de tanghui*), which openly gets involved in the life of the mainstream society in China.<sup>37</sup> In other words, an open and integrated church has become a leading vision of the urban house churches. Sun, like many other urban house church Christians, are eager to explore and carry out what the church can offer to society.

While aspiring to see the church impacting society, Sun is still cautious about social engagement. He acknowledges the needs in the present socio-political context, yet he realises that any response to the context is not simply driven by the context or for the context. Instead, he insists that the church's cultural mandate and social concern are in the realm of Christian witness, and the church impacts culture and society by setting up a godly Christian model.<sup>38</sup> In other words, a godly Christian model itself, conducted in various areas of social life, will impact and attract social groups to follow. This implies that the church should not socially engage in the way of the world. Having all these ideas, Sun admits that all the possible social impacts are not themselves the goal of the church. Instead, they are simply a by-product of the church's open and integrated witness for Christ in the world.<sup>39</sup>

### 5.2.2 A Pious Christian Spirituality

The previous section shows that Sun on the one hand points out the church's potential for social impact, while on the other hand he stresses that social impact will transpire through the church's godly Christian witness in the world. Sun values both the Great Commission and cultural mandate. But his consideration of social impact

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<sup>37</sup> Sun, 'Jidujiao Jiuguo Qingjie,' 37-38.

<sup>38</sup> Ibid., 40.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 39.

as a by-product indicates an Evangelical conservative inclination. This section will explore Sun's understanding of a pious Christian spirituality. It will reveal how he maintains a conservative spirituality and develops it to include a communal piety and an outward dimension of spirituality that will encourage the church's social engagement.

In his understanding of a pious Christian spirituality, Sun emphasises an ultimate hope and how it may guide the Christian life on earth. He states that the Christian's ultimate hope is Christ's second coming, the Christian's resurrection from the dead and reign together with Christ. This ultimate hope releases the Christian from the burden of the world, viewing the latter from a perspective of truth.<sup>40</sup> Sun perceives that people in a fast-paced modern world are rarely concerned about the invisible world. Yet for Christians, the kingdom of heaven (*tian guo*) is not just in the heart but also in their daily lives in which their here-and-now experience of the kingdom of heaven are more real than the realities of life in this world.<sup>41</sup> As the kingdom of God (*shen de guo*) has come into the world through Christ's incarnation, life and resurrection, Christians receive this kingdom, depart from the world's slavery for humanity and receive abundant life from Christ.<sup>42</sup> Therefore, holding fast to the ultimate hope, Christians can take the world lightly, neither being attached to it nor wishing to escape from it. They enjoy the good things given from God in the world, yet do not linger on them.<sup>43</sup> Accordingly, in a practical sense, Sun

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<sup>40</sup> Sun Yi, 'Women Panwang de Shi Shenme' [What We Are Hoping For], @ *Shouwang* 77, (April 2015): 6.

<sup>41</sup> Sun Yi, 'Mengen de Queju' [The Assurance of Receiving God's Grace], *Shouwang Wangluo Qikan* [*Shouwang Online Journal*] 22, (March 2012): 32.

<sup>42</sup> Sun Yi, 'Ren de Shengcun Yu Jidu de Jiushu' [Humanity's Existence and Christ's Atonement], *Xing Hua* [*Almond Flowers*] 19, no.1 (Spring and Summer 2012): 14.

<sup>43</sup> Sun Yi, 'Jidu Jiushi Shengming' [Christ Is Life], @ *Shouwang* 85, (January 2015): 8.

acknowledges that Christians should faithfully fulfil their duty and responsibilities in the church and in the world, and this demands diligence and care for the outcome of ministry. However, Sun admonishes that Christians should not live for or be limited by specific goals in their life and ministry because the result of ministry is secondary, given that it is not the source of comfort and reward. Therefore, Christians should transcend specific goals and reach the level of knowing Christ and the power of his resurrection. They conduct life and ministry for the sake of Christ in order to please him and prepare for his imminent second coming.<sup>44</sup>

A conservative spirituality is important to Sun, so he joins the leaders of Shouwang church in a refusal against the TSPM. Sun explains several reasons for the refusal: (1) the TSPM was formed under political movements of the Communists, for the state's political purposes in the time of cold war; it therefore cannot represent the majority of the Chinese churches; (2) the TSPM has caused much oppression and damage to the churches; (3) while most house churches adhere to Evangelical theology, the TSPM is theologically liberal; (4) the TSPM is quasi-governmental therefore contradicting the 'three-self principles'; (5) the TSPM functions for the CCP's united front policy and takes patriotism rather than the church as its top priority. Sun insists that the TSPM by its nature is not a church or church organisation.<sup>45</sup> Sun's criticism against the TSPM as 'theologically liberal' is consistent with that of the fundamentalist pastor Wang Mingdao, rather than fairly reflecting the full picture of the TSPM, under which many Christians, at least in the local levels, are Evangelicals. While this point of Sun does not do justice to reality in

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<sup>44</sup> Sun Yi, 'Yi Renshi Yesu Jidu Wei Zhibao' [Knowing Jesus Christ Is the Most Precious], @ *Shouwang* 81, (August 2015): 7.

<sup>45</sup> Sun Yi, 'Women Weihe Bu Jiaru Sanzi Aiguohui' [Why We Do Not Join The TSPM], *Xing Hua* [Almond Flowers] 13, no. 3 (Autumn 2010): 90-91.

his time, his other points can still explain fairly the situation. While Wang Mingdao claims theological difference as the sole reason of rejecting the TSPM, Sun includes a few more reasons, mostly in terms of politics, for the rejection. This indicates that the fundamentalist-modernist controversy is no longer a major or primary concern in Sun's time, and Sun turns to the issue of church-state relationship for his rejection of the TSPM.

Nevertheless, viewing the TSPM as quasi-governmental, Sun criticises the government for manipulating patriotism to monopolise religious affairs and force religions to serve the interest of the CCP.<sup>46</sup> Such manipulation and monopoly will only confuse religion and politics and provoke religious extremism. An example is the terrorist attack at the Kunming railway station in March 2014. Sun then argues that traditional religions should be granted freedom to develop according to their own traditions, and they should be allowed to positively influence society and bring reconciliation to social tensions and hatred.<sup>47</sup> This view of Sun sounds similar with that of Wang Weifan who on various occasions argues for traditional religions' freedom of development. Both Sun and Wang value the freedom of religious belief for all religions, acknowledge their potential positive impact on society, and criticise the TSPM and the government's policy for damaging this freedom and potential. Perhaps the difference between Sun and Wang is that Wang's criticism is mostly against the TSPM and explained within the framework of existing policies, whereas Sun, as an outsider of the TSPM, is freer to criticise both the TSPM and the government.

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<sup>46</sup> Sun comments that like adding the Law in the Apostle Paul's time and penance in Martin Luther's time, adding patriotism to the church in the present China is a result of humanity's sinful nature. Sun, 'Shi Jiaohui Chengwei,' 54-55.

<sup>47</sup> Sun Yi, 'Yu Shangdi Hehao Ba' [Be Reconciled to God], @ *Shouwang* 62, (March 2014): 9.

Besides freedom for traditional religions in a broad sense, from a devotional perspective, Sun argues for freedom in the spirit against political oppression. Sun believes that freedom in the spirit is given from above, rather than born with, acquired by blood, or granted by other people. Although this freedom is an inner experience, humans are responsible to safeguard it since it is expressed not only in thought but also in daily life in society. Sun urges, no matter what happens in life, the Christian shall not take this freedom and its Giver as secondary.<sup>48</sup> Treasuring this freedom in the spirit and freedom for religions' development, Sun sees them incompatible with political oppression. While Sun inherits Wang Mingdao's view of the TSPM and looks to an ultimate hope in Christ and a devotional life on earth, it is no surprise that Sun's understanding of a pious Christian spirituality leads to his rejection of the TSPM.

Sun's uncompromising stand on freedom in the spirit and its Giver is just like that of the previous generation house church leaders Wang Mingdao and Lin Xingao, who refused the TSPM and endured imprisonment for their faith. However, Sun perceives limits in the older generation house church spirituality and develops it further to include a communal piety and an outward dimension of spirituality. Regarding the downside of individual piety and the necessity of a communal piety, Sun states,

Although the pietistic movement in church history has greatly helped us to understand the 'inner person,' gradually it tended to over-emphasise the individual's experience in the spirit. Then, the connection between believers, which is given by the same Holy Spirit through Christ, was lost. This loss caused misunderstanding and bias. In fact, the Holy Spirit does not merely work in the individual's heart. He also works within the believers' community,

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<sup>48</sup> Sun Yi, 'Ziyou Lunti Zhiyi' [On Freedom 1], *Shouwang Wangluo Qikan* [Shouwang Online Journal] 39, (November 2012): 50.

and the depth of the ‘inner person’ depends on the depth of the church members’ communion.<sup>49</sup>

Thus, the implication is that Christians in their piety should bear in mind the integrity of the church community and foster a communal piety among all church members.

Besides a communal piety as opposed to individual piety, Sun perceives spiritual piety an outward dimension, which is expressed through an outwardly engaging life. Sun describes the pietistic tradition of Wang Mingdao’s generation as focusing on the Christian’s inner condition: an inner, sometimes mystical, experience with Christ in one’s spiritual devotion. He acknowledges that this pietism has made great contributions to knowing the ‘inner person.’ However, he points out its lack of an outward dimension, which can be traced to John Calvin, who explains that the knowledge of pietism comes from daily life experience rather than from theoretical thinking.<sup>50</sup> In other words, Christians learn and grow in piety through daily life experience. The older generation Christians focused on inner piety and the modern generation focuses on individualism, understanding faith as a matter of the individual’s heart. However, Sun understands spirituality as not just a matter of the individual but a reference for every aspect of daily life in the world. This idea makes sense in the view that the heavenly reign and the present world are in the same sphere, as Paul indicates in 1 Corinthians 4:9. Hence, Sun states that the priority of spiritual sensitivity is not an inner satisfaction in the spirit, and witness are not solely dependent on the Christian’s obedience to the leading of the Holy Spirit. Instead, the Christian should obey the words of God and live out love and awe in life and

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<sup>49</sup> Sun Yi, ‘Yu Zong Shengtu Yitong Linghui Jidu de Ai’ [Understanding Christ’s Love together with the Saints], @ *Shouwang* 96, (November 2016): 20.

<sup>50</sup> Sun Yi, ‘Jingqian Yu Richang Shenghuo’ [Piety and Daily Life], *Xing Hua* [Almond Flowers] 20, no. 2 (Autumn 2012): 17.

practice. In practice, the Christian should learn to see God's work in the world and participate in it.<sup>51</sup>

The above discussion shows that Sun develops spiritual pietism from the older generation's individual and inner piety to include a communal piety and an outward dimension of spirituality. While a communal piety corresponds to Sun's view of the church's integrity, an outward dimension of spirituality is in line with his view of the church's openness. Consequently, Sun is able to find a connection between a developed pious Christian spirituality and his vision of 'a city set on a hill,' namely, the church's social engagement through its openness and integrity. Thus, while inheriting a conservative spirituality from older generation Evangelicals, Sun has also developed it in response to his context.

### 5.2.3 An Approach of Constructive Dialogue

The previous sections have discussed Sun's theological thinking in two major areas. Firstly, Sun explains the church's openness and integrity as the crucial parts of fulfilling a vision of the church as 'a city set on a hill.' Secondly, Sun develops previous generation conservative Christians' individual and inner piety to include a communal piety and outward dimension of spirituality so as to encourage the church's social engagement. This section will explain that on a practical level, Sun takes an approach of constructive dialogue as a way of acquiring for the church a platform of social engagement and pushing the church to the public.

Generally speaking, because of decades of distrust, house churches have been taking a non-cooperation approach towards the TSPM and the CCP's religious policy. This non-cooperation approach is usually expressed through various ways

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<sup>51</sup> Ibid., 18-19.



like silence, avoidance, disengagement and refusal. However, started from the 2000s, there have been significant cases of rights defence, which are undertaken by both secular and Christian lawyers such as Wang Yi.<sup>52</sup> Rights defence is appreciated by some Christians as well as secular citizens since it is an active defence of various kinds of rights violated by civil authorities. However, Sun Mingyi, who seems to know well and share some common views with the leaders of Shouwang church, considers rights defence a problematic approach to the church.<sup>53</sup> Meanwhile, Sun Yi and other leaders of Shouwang church take an approach of constructive dialogue with the government. Dialogue became objectively possible in 2005 as the ‘Regulation on Religious Affairs’ (*zongjiao shiwu tiaoli*) was issued by the State Council and took effect. The Regulation was generally perceived as sending a signal of lenient religious policy. Statements like ‘religious activities are usually conducted in registered religious venues’ in the Regulation seems to imply that religious activities at other venues like homes and offices are not necessarily illegal. Therefore, without joining the TSPM, Sun perceives that having constructive dialogue with the government can be a means to register Shouwang church as a religious organisation. Sun believes that once Shouwang church obtains a legal status through registration, it will become open to the public and be able to bear ‘open and

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<sup>52</sup> Wang Yi was a former law professor at Chengdu University, founder and senior pastor of Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu.

<sup>53</sup> Sun Mingyi points out that rights defence is a political rather than theological approach. It takes a political approach aiming to solve both church rights issues and various human rights issues. It brings a complicated situation to the house churches in China: (1) a close association between church business and political business will drag the church into an unfavourable situation; (2) rights defence from a political perspective may prioritise a socio-political burden over a burden for the church. This priority may fail to protect the interest of the church. Sun Mingyi, ‘Renshi Zhongguo Chengshi Jiating Jiaohui’ [Knowing Urban House Churches in China], in *Zhongguo Jidujiao Jiating Jiaohui Wenti Yanjiu* [Study on Issues of House Churches in China], ed. Liu Peng, Pushi Institute for Social Science, 2009, accessed 5 November 2017, <http://www.pacilution.com/ShowArticle.asp?ArticleID=2818>.

integrated witness' for Christ in the world. In July 2006, Shouwang church applied to register as a religious organisation.

Nevertheless, both Shouwang's request of registration and appeal to higher levels of religious authorities were officially rejected in the same year. In retrospect, the setback of Shouwang's request was not a surprise. Regarding the 2005 Regulation, Lauren B. Homer comments that it was initially promoted as bringing a 'paradigm shift' in the religious area: from stringent regulation to recognition of autonomy, and from confrontation to harmony.<sup>54</sup> However, Homer points out that the Regulation contains ambiguous details and unworkable provisions, such as the lack of implementation guidelines. As a consequence, in 2010, after some hesitant attempts to register their churches, house church pastors and their lawyers concluded that it was 'a fruitless and often dangerous exercise.'<sup>55</sup> The 2005 Regulation's own technical inability contributed to its failure. Yet, Homer comments that while state control over religious affairs is not officially relinquished, the national government is unwilling or unable to implement the rule of law in the religious area.<sup>56</sup> According to Vala, the 2005 Regulation is a sham.<sup>57</sup>

In the case of Shouwang church, the request of registration brought direct contact then conflict with local authorities. The oppression upon Shouwang church, which started on the 10<sup>th</sup> of April 2011, marked the beginning of Shouwang church's years of outdoor Sunday services. Then gradually, it became impossible for

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<sup>54</sup> Lauren B. Homer, 'Registration of Chinese Protestant House Churches under China's 2005 Regulation on Religious Affairs: Resolving the Implementation Impasse,' *Journal of Church and State* 52, no. 1 (2010): 52.

<sup>55</sup> Homer explains that those who have tried to register their congregations have been rejected. Some of them have been arrested for prior unregistered activities, and their lawyers have been jailed or disbarred for 'anti-state activities.' Ibid., 55.

<sup>56</sup> Ibid., 54.

<sup>57</sup> Vala, 177.

Shouwang church to have Sunday services together, even outdoor, as a single congregation. In 2013, Sun realised that Shouwang church would go through various struggles in the process of building up the church. Yet Sun still seemed to expect the church to experience a breakthrough in spiritual warfare and be a witness to the presence of the kingdom of God.<sup>58</sup> Compared to this optimistic expectation, in 2014, Sun realised the severity of the situation. He explained the unavoidable conflict between a Christ-alone-honouring church and an authoritarian state. Sun stated that through its control over legislation, education system and social media, the authoritarian political leadership demanded the masses' life, thought and speech to be in line with its Communist 'universal truth' (*yuzhou zhenli*). Under an 'unprecedented social control system,' a Christian community would definitely be a threat to the authoritarian state.<sup>59</sup>

Later in 2015, the fourth year of outdoor Sunday service, Sun stated that he was still sure of God's leading for Shouwang church to obtain its own church venue (*jian tang*), and God will bring it to pass in His way.<sup>60</sup> Nevertheless, Sun no longer considers *jian tang* as a symbol of God's leading through the years. Instead, he turns to the spiritual field of the Christian life. He believes that 'if church members have experienced deep growth in life and fellowship in difficult situations...even if our outdoor Sunday services do not end up moving in a new church venue, that should

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<sup>58</sup> Sun, 'Shi Jiaohui Chengwei,' 57-58.

<sup>59</sup> Sun Yi, 'Shenguo Linzai de Zhengzhan' [The Battle of the Present of the Kingdom of God], @ *Shouwang* 63, (April 2014): 38-40.

<sup>60</sup> 'jian tang' literally means 'build a church building.' However, in the context of Shouwang church in Beijing, it refers to buying a room or rooms in an office building and use it as a church venue.

not be considered a failure of Shouwang church.<sup>61</sup> In other words, failure of *jian tang* is not a failure of Shouwang church, which may have spiritually developed through the past experiences.

At the end of 2015, Sun addressed Shouwang church's difficult situation and the issue of suffering. He admitted that some weaknesses of church members were due to Shouwang church's inability to have members physically meeting for Sunday services for the last four years. While Sunday services had to be 'online,' some fellowship groups had to try hard to sustain their meetings. Meanwhile, Sun commented that the campaign to remove crosses in Zhejiang province since 2014 and oppression upon churches elsewhere, like the ban of Huo Shi church in Gui Yang in December 2015, indicated the coming of a cold winter period for Christians nationwide. Under these circumstances, leaders of Shouwang church realise that it will take a longer time if they consider *jian tang* as a sign of breakthrough in the context. Yet if the overall political situation does not change, *jian tang* will not mean an end of a period, but rather the encounter of more intense conflicts. Observing all the difficulties, Sun comments that Christians are living in a time of 'suffering for righteousness,' in which they must keep a steady heart, taking the responsibilities of the church and looking forward to the path ahead.<sup>62</sup> In April 2016, pastor Jin Tianming, who had been under house arrest for five years, expressed a renewed understanding of Shouwang's path. To Jin, what God has fulfilled in Shouwang church in the past five years is different yet far surpassing what they planned and

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<sup>61</sup> The leaders of Shouwang, including Sun, believe that obtaining their own church venue will provide the facility support for Shouwang's aim of becoming an open and integrated church, bringing breakthrough in the context and open witness for Christ in society. Cf. Sun, '*Women Panwang de*,' 9-10.

<sup>62</sup> Sun Yi, 'Yi Suchang de Xin Miandui Wei Yi Shouku' [Taking a Steady Heart to Face Suffering for Righteousness], @ *Shouwang* 86, (January 2016): 12-13.

expected. Jin believes that through years of outdoor services, Shouwang church has demonstrated an unshakable ‘city on a hill,’ which is far more than what would have been achieved through moving into a new church venue.<sup>63</sup>

It seems that leaders of Shouwang church, including Sun and Jin, have renewed their assessment of the situation and adjusted their theological reflection and emphasis. When it becomes difficult, even impossible, to have legal registration and an open platform in society, they turn to emphasise spiritual gain in their suffering for righteousness in the socio-political context. Sun further explains that Christians who suffer for righteousness are blessed in various ways. Firstly, as Christ is a suffering Christ, members of Shouwang church suffer with Christ and with the marginalised masses of the nation. Secondly, enduring suffering helps Christians to understand the present context and become more effective witnesses for Christ. Thirdly, in times of suffering, Christians learn to rely on God and hold on to a more real hope of the future.<sup>64</sup> This reflection on suffering suggests that in a time of difficulty and suffering, Sun chose to stress spiritual vitality in the Christian life. Nonetheless, after six years of Shouwang church’s Sunday services ‘online’ and his reflection on suffering and spiritual renewal, Sun still stated three areas of impact of the church as ‘a city set on a hill’: (1) life witness and gospel spread; (2) charity and aid; (3) politics and public engagement.<sup>65</sup> Although Sun did not seem enthusiastic about discussing politics and public engagement, it was obvious that in the midst of difficulty and suffering, Sun and the leaders of Shouwang kept their vision for the

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<sup>63</sup> Jin Tianming, ‘Habagu Zhi Ge: Yiren Bi Yixin de Sheng-Huwai Jingbai Wu Zhounian Jinian Wen’ [The Song of Habakkuk: The Righteous Shall Live by Faith-A Written Memorial of Five-Year Outdoor Worships], @ *Shouwang* 89, (April 2016): 21.

<sup>64</sup> Sun, ‘Yi Suchang de Xin,’ 13.

<sup>65</sup> Sun Yi, ‘Shishang de Guang’ [Light in the World], @ *Shouwang* 101, (April 2017): 12.

church. The steadfastness to their vision was still true when Shouwang church was officially banned by local authorities in March 2019. The church in its response mentioned that this ban marked a new round of spiritual warfare, and it was a result of the conflict between the government and the church's promotion of the vision 'a city set on a hill' and witness of Christ in the public sphere.<sup>66</sup>

### 5.3 Evaluation

The previous sections have explored Sun's various theological concerns on the openness and integrity of the church, Christian spirituality and dialogue with civil authorities. Generally speaking, Sun proposes an open approach toward the socio-political context. His proposal includes valuable insights but encounters serious difficulties. The following sections will evaluate Sun's theological concerns in terms of vision, spirituality and dialogue.

#### Vision

Sun's vision of 'a city set on a hill' captures his emphases on both openness and integrity. The church is to be a Christian community with integrity in terms of the church's sociality and organised polity. The church with integrity is to be open to the world and be seen by the wider society. Sun's understanding of the church leads to an approach of open engagement with society. Sun understands that the church is to impact society through its open and integrated witness of Christ in the world. This vision of Sun is integrated in the sense that it explains why the church should be

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<sup>66</sup> 'Beijing Shouwang Jiaohui Zao Qudi-Gao Huizhongshu Biaoming Du Zun Yesu Bu Wei Qiangquan' [Beijing Shouwang Church Banned-Letter to the Congregation Reveals Exclusive Honouring of Jesus and not Fearing of Powers], Jidu Ribao [Christ Daily], 28 March 2019, <https://chinese.gospelherald.com/articles/27779/20190328/北京守望教會遭取締-告會眾書表明獨尊耶穌不畏政權>.

open and integrated, and how the church may impact society with its openness and integrity. Sun's theological thought is traced to Calvinist theology, especially Neo-Calvinism. Yet, Sun has carefully formulated the two themes, openness and integrity, and he has clearly explained them in the present Chinese context. Considering the collective leadership and institutionalised structure of Shouwang church, the vision has been held by the church. But as a Christian scholar and a core leader of Shouwang church, Sun has been a key figure who formulates, describes, explains and practices the vision and the two themes.

Although Sun is a key figure of promoting an open approach of socio-political engagement, a tension seems to remain in his thinking. On the one hand, Sun realises that leading an open approach is a pioneering work among house churches in China. In starting a pioneering work, Sun implies his own sentiment of national salvation and his serious concern for the issues and crises in society. On the other hand, he looks to biblical and theological supports for the church's social engagement, and he renders social change as a by-product of the church's witness of Christ. One may suggest that Sun wishes to impact the socio-political context based on Evangelical principles. However, by considering social change as by-product and the church's witness itself as sufficient, Sun weakens the role of the socio-political context as a crucial cause in shaping the direction of his theological reflection. His attempt to reconcile the church's cultural mandate and the Great Commission indicates that Sun is hesitant to acknowledge the context as a crucial element in his theological reflection.<sup>67</sup> However, one must ask if the church's openness and

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<sup>67</sup> Sun insists that if the church places the cultural mandate on the level of witness, namely, influencing various social groups through its own witness as a good model, then this does not contradict the Great Commission but rather, it is the church's responsibility for society. Sun, 'Jidujiao Jiuguo Qingjie,' 40.

integrity are emphasised primarily because they are biblically and theologically grounded, why were they not proposed or emphasised by Wang Mingdao or Lin Xiangao? As a matter of fact, the biblical and theological sources are always there. What matters is why Sun proposes the vision and the two themes here and now. Although Sun intends to emphasise the biblical and theological bases of his reflection on the context, the context is a major driving force, or a strong motivation, that pushes his open approach, and even determines the framework of his theological reflection.

That being said, it is still necessary to note that Sun's emphasis on biblical and theological sources makes him different from those whose thoughts are primarily driven by the context and for the context. Sun is therefore a conservative Evangelical who insists on the priority of Christian witness of Christ. Within the Evangelical circle, Sun represents more open Evangelicals who have a serious burden and interest in impacting society in contrast to those who primarily, if not exclusively, have their focus on the church.

### Spirituality

As a tension exists in Sun's theology, it makes sense that on the one hand he inherits the older generation Christians' spiritual pietism, and on the other hand, he develops it to include a communal piety and an outward dimension of spirituality. Nevertheless, this inclusion appears to bring a new development rather than cause a tension. After all, it appears to help strengthen Sun's vision and the church's move towards openness and integrity.

While Sun is able to explain a pious Christian spirituality, which supports the church's openness and integrity, it may also bring some potential challenges.



Alexander Chow mentions that Calvinist and Reformed churches in East Asian, like those in South Korea and in Taiwan, have been declining in number despite their public commitment. A closely related concern is that Calvinism is often considered as a highly intellectualised theological system.<sup>68</sup> It is noted that Sun's vision of 'a city set on a hill' and his burden of public engagement are basically inspired by Calvinism, particularly Neo-Calvinism, and his argument for the church's openness and integrity can be intellectually justified according to Calvinist theology. However, when both the public commitment and the way of justifying this commitment are highly intellectual, will a highly intellectualised orientation somehow weaken the Christian's spiritual vitality? When Sun explains the commonality between the church and other social groups and promote institutionalisation as an effective way of influencing the latter, his idea of institutionalisation is criticised by some Christians as moving towards secularisation.<sup>69</sup> Perhaps a question behind this criticism is that if the church is doing things in a way similar with the way of the secular world, even outwardly, how likely, or to what extent, can the Christian's spiritual vitality be maintained beneath a secular, or seemingly secular, form of practice?

While this question is substantial during a time that Calvinist and Reformed churches are declining in numbers in East Asia, Fulton discusses a trend towards religious consumerism already existing among some Christians in urban centres of China. This religious consumerism is often expressed as 'church hopping,' searching for 'a more interesting pastor, better youth group or children's program, or even a

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<sup>68</sup> Chow, 'Calvinist Public Theology,' 174.

<sup>69</sup> Sun, 'Shi Jiaohui Chengwei,' 56.

more pleasant worship facility.’<sup>70</sup> While a prosperity gospel may be embraced by some, large church structures have been erected by some congregations with a consideration that these visible signs may cause nonbelievers to see the church as a ‘successful’ institution.<sup>71</sup> In the face of religious consumerism, some Christian leaders warn that Christians who seek entertainment in their religious life will not know what to do if they encounter difficulty. Others believe that the oppression in the past did serve to strengthen the church, and the new freedom and new opportunities in the urban environment can bring decline to the church’s spiritual vitality. Thus, viewing spiritual decline as a result of religious consumerism and cherishing the spiritual strength in times of oppression, some Christian leaders may not know what to do if the church were granted complete religious freedom.<sup>72</sup> Given the phenomena described by Fulton, those churches that appear comfortable, professional and successful are more likely to become a focal point of religious consumerism. In this sense, Sun’s argument for the commonality between the church and other social groups and proposal of the church’s institutionalisation as a way of strengthening the church as well as influencing the world will present Shouwang church as a comfortable, professional and successful church.

One may argue that the source of religious consumerism is materialism and secularism developed in the world rather than originated in the church. But religious consumerism reveals how some Christians, especially those in urban centres, respond to the influence of materialism and secularism. To Sun, the church’s institutionalisation itself by no means invites the influence of materialism and

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<sup>70</sup> Fulton, 54.

<sup>71</sup> Ibid., 51.

<sup>72</sup> Fulton gives an example of one pastor who answered what would happen if the church were granted complete religious freedom: ‘We are finished (*jiu wanle*).’ Ibid., 55.

secularism. However, when the church seeks to impact the world partially by presenting commonality with the latter, it also exposes itself more to the latter's influence. When all things are on track inside an institutionalised church and the outside world is comfortable, it can be difficult to find an impetus for a fervent spirituality, especially when the world is influenced by materialism and secularism and the church basically exercises a highly intellectualised theology.

The potential vulnerability toward the influence of materialism and secularism by no means denies Sun's argument for church institutionalisation or Shouwang church's move towards openness and integrity. It may be arguable that Calvinism, particularly Neo-Calvinism, is a proper or 'right' theology in the sense that it provides a proper rationale for the church's public commitment. Nevertheless, a proper theology cannot do everything for the Christian life or the church. Even when a theology is right, at least intellectually, spiritual vitality is yet another matter. Given the context of rapid growth of modernisation, urbanisation and secularisation, as well as the emergence of religious consumerism, a highly intellectualised public theology is likely to leave the church vulnerable to the effects of these realities and therefore spiritually debilitated.

### Dialogue

Shouwang church's effort of registering the church as a religious organisation through a means of constructive dialogue with the government was a pioneering attempt among urban house churches. It therefore bears great significance. Wang Yi venerates pastor Jin Tianming as the pastor of house churches because Jin, as well as members of Shouwang church, is bearing the oppression for the rest who undertake

an approach of openness.<sup>73</sup> Liu Tongsu, an American Chinese pastor and co-author of a book with Wang Yi,<sup>74</sup> also commends Shouwang church as defending the maximum space of house churches as it was an example of testing the government's policy and suffering for house churches as a whole.<sup>75</sup> While it was a significant attempt for house churches, it was a serious challenge to the government. But the government was not ready for this challenge. When the government rejected Shouwang's quest and imposed oppression upon the church, both the attempt of registration and the means of dialogue failed.

As a political liberal and former law professor, Wang Yi admits that house churches' registration, namely being legalised without joining the TSPM, is part of the formation of a civil society. That means, without the preparation in areas like the rule of law, affirmation of private property rights, civil rights defence and freedom of association, house churches can hardly move alone and succeed in their open approach. Even if house churches wish to be open to society, openness cannot yet be the vision of the time (*shidai de yixiang*).<sup>76</sup> By 'the vision of the time,' Wang seems to mean a vision shared by the majority, if not all of the Christians in China, when the socio-political context is ready for the vision.

Wang's comment implies that the time is not yet ready for an overall change in the socio-political context. This is reminiscent of Homer's comment that the

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<sup>73</sup> Wang Yi, 'Jin Tianming Shi Ni Shenme Ren' [Who Is Jin Tianming for You], *Shouwang Wangluo Qikan* [Shouwang Online Journal] 45, (March 2013): 51.

<sup>74</sup> Cf. Liu Tongsu and Wang Yi, *Guankan Zhongguo Chengshi Jiating Jiaohui* [Observations on China's House Churches in Cities] (Taipei: Christian Arts Press, 2012).

<sup>75</sup> Liu Tongsu, 'Shouwang Ziyou de Tiankong: Ping Beijing Shouwang Jiaohui Zaici Huwai Jingbai' [Watch the Sky of Freedom: On Beijing Shouwang Church's Outdoor Worship], *Xing Hua* [Almond Flowers] 17, no. 3 (Autumn 2011): 37.

<sup>76</sup> Wang Yi, 'Lun Jiating Jiaohui Chuantong he Chengshi Jiaohui de Gongkaihua (Xia)' [On House Church Tradition and the Openness of Urban Churches (2)], *Zhongguo Renquan Shuangzhoukan* [China Human Rights Biweekly] 17, (14 January 2010), accessed 30 May 2019. <http://biweeklyarchive.hrichina.org/article/290.html>.

government is not ready to relinquish control over religious affairs and is unwilling or unable to implement the rule of law in religious areas. Similarly, Wielander describes the government's unwillingness to open the charity sector for social organisations and its 'regulatory pitfalls and restrictions imposed on religious charity.'<sup>77</sup> Thus, when the government is not willing or ready to implement the rule of law and endeavour to build a civil society, it is unlikely, or impossible, that it will grant registration or any rights of openness to Protestant house churches.

It may be a reasonable explanation that Shouwang church is oppressed because its open approach threatens the CCP's control over religious affairs. However, in a comparison between Shouwang church and Fuyin church, a church in Beijing also led by intellectual Christians yet follow the traditional form of discreet house fellowships (*jiating juhui*), Deng Yingqiao describes that the two churches are both highly monitored by the government and undergo political pressure.<sup>78</sup> This information indicates that the government tries to monitor and keep control of house churches, despite the difference in their church approaches and perceived levels of threat. It also suggests that the government is far from willing or ready to grant religious freedom and allow the formation of a civil society. The situation even became worse in the second half of the 2010s when China experienced a transition of political leadership. Christians face new waves of religious oppression under the new state leadership, and Shouwang church was officially banned in March 2019.

However, although the attempt of registration failed and the door of dialogue was shut, Sun, as well as leaders of Shouwang church, keep their vision and insist on

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<sup>77</sup> Wielander, 65-84, 155-56.

<sup>78</sup> Deng Yingqiao, 'Beijing Jiating Jiaohui de Shenfen Zuobiao: Shouwang Jiaohuo Gean Bufen' [The Identity Coordinates of Beijing House Churches: The Case of Shouwang Church], *Xing Hua* [*Almond Flowers*] 21, no. 3 (Winter 2012): 24.

the openness and integrity of the church. Perhaps the reason for Sun's persistence can be observed from an explanation of Sun Mingyi. In May 2007, Sun Mingyi claimed that many urban house churches realise that 'it is the time for house churches to rise to the surface (*fu chu shui mian*).'<sup>79</sup> However, later in March 2008, he explained that this statement was not a judgement upon the socio-political situation. Rather, it refers to the awakening of house churches' group consciousness (*qunti yishi*) and a new understanding of their context and social responsibility.<sup>80</sup> Sun Mingyi here implies that the awakening and new understanding do not necessarily indicate that the time is ready for real changes to take place in the socio-political context. Yet, unreadiness of the context by no means denies this awakening and new understanding, nor their value and potential. In the same sense, to Sun Yi, failure of dialogue, registration and *jian tang* by no means deny the value and potential of Shouwang's vision of 'a city set on a hill' and its pursuit of openness and integrity of the church. However, as the context has become worse in late 2010s, it will remain a struggle for Sun's vision and an open approach of social engagement.

#### 5.4 Conclusion

Sun Yi's vision of 'a city set on a hill' is concerned about how the church with Christian witness can impact society. He proposes the formation of the church's integrity to build up the Christian witness, and the quest of the church's openness as the channel for Christian witness to be shining to the public. While Sun is seriously concerned about and strongly motivated by the social context in his theological

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<sup>79</sup> Sun Mingyi, 'Renshi Zhongguo Chengshi.'

<sup>80</sup> Sun Mingyi, 'Dui Jiating Jiaohui Xunqiu Dengji de Shenxue Fansi' [A Theological Reflection on House Churches' Request of Registration], *Xing Hua* [*Almond Flowers*] 3, no. 1 (Spring 2008): 43.

reflection, he nonetheless emphasises the biblical and theological bases of the church's socio-political engagement. He employs Neo-Calvinist theology and explains it in the Chinese context. He also reflects on older generation house church Christians' spirituality and develops it to suit an open approach of social engagement. He emphasises the Christian's witness of Christ in the world, and he stresses the church's social concern and responsibility. Sun therefore demonstrates an urban Evangelical Christian who starts to have a vision and formulate an open approach towards society.

The government's rejection of Shouwang church's registration and following oppression upon the church indicate that the government's readiness is a vital condition for the realisation of Sun's vision and public engagement. Nevertheless, Sun's persistence on the vision through the past difficult years indicates its value and potential. Although the socio-political context has not been ready or even become worse in the late 2010s, Sun's vision and the two themes of openness and integrity of the church reveal an awakening of house church Christians' group consciousness and a new understanding of their context and social responsibility. Although there will be a struggle in church-state relationship and difficulty in the fulfilment of Sun's vision, Sun has nevertheless explored and discussed a valuable approach of open social engagement among urban house church Christians.

## VI. WU WEIQING'S INSISTENCE OF A CHRIST-CENTRED THEOLOGY

The previous chapter has discussed Sun Yi's vision of a city set on a hill, which proposes openness and values integrity of the church. Sun's approach of openness represents a voice of house church Christians who have an interest and burden of open engagement with the wider society. Yet the government's rejection of Shouwang church's request of registration reveals the former's unwillingness or unreadiness to grant legal status to house churches. As Shouwang church has gone through difficult times and received an official ban in 2019, Sun's vision seems unlikely to be realised in a predictable future. This chapter will explore the major theological concerns of Wu Weiqing, who has been the senior pastor of Beijing Haidian Christian Church, registered under the TSPM. Like Sun, Wu also explicitly expresses a burden for the nation and urges Christians to engage with the wider society. Yet, holding a Christ-centred theology, Wu proposes faith in Christ, namely, people's conversion to Christ, as the solution to socio-political problems therefore changing society.

### 6.1 Profile of Wu Weiqing

Wu was born in 1964. He received a bachelor's degree from NUTS in 1988. From 1989, he started working in a Three-Self church in Dandong city, Liaoning province, and he was ordained as pastor in 1993. In the same year, Wu was elected as a member of both the Youth Federation of Dandong and People's Political Consultative Conference of Dandong. In 1995, Wu went to study at the University of



Winnipeg in Canada and received a Master of Arts degree in spiritual disciplines and ministry practices in 1997. After returning to China, he worked for the national *lianghui*, specifically its Department of Foreign Liaison. In 1998, Wu started teaching at the Yanjing Theological Seminary in Beijing, and he was elected as a committee member of the Youth Federation of Beijing. From 2001, Wu served as the senior pastor of the Haidian church in Beijing. In 2003, Wu was elected the vice president of Beijing *lianghui* as well as a member of People's Congress of Beijing. In 2007, Wu was elected as a member of the Standing Committee of Beijing People's Political Consultative Conference. In 2008, Wu was again elected as a member of People's Congress of Beijing, as well as a member of the Standing Committee of national *lianghui*. In 2016, Wu received the degree of Doctor of Ministry from Fuller Theological Seminary, in which he started his part-time studies from 2008. Currently, Wu works as the vice president and general secretary of Beijing *lianghui*, president of the TSPM of the Haidian district of Beijing, a member of Beijing People's Congress, and a member of the Standing Committee of Haidian district People's Political Consultative Conference.<sup>1</sup>

## 6.2 Wu's Theology

Wu has long been a pastor, a leader of local *lianghui*, a member of national *lianghui* at some point and a member of local political institutions. Wu therefore has his focus on church ministry while taking posts in *lianghui* and political organs. Wu's studies, including his doctoral studies, have been ministry focused and he does not publish many academic works. However, he has plenty of Sunday sermons as

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<sup>1</sup> For further biographical details of Wu Weiqing, see 'Jiaomu Tuandui' [Pastoral Team], Beijing Haidian Christian Church, accessed 11 November 2019, <http://www.hdchurch.org/about/team>.

well as his doctoral dissertation accessible on the Internet.<sup>2</sup> These resources reveal that Wu has a Christ-centred theology and it significantly shapes his socio-political approach. For the purposes of the present study, the following sections will focus on Wu's thoughts on a Christ-centred theology, the Christian's responsibility, church-state relationship, oppression and suffering.

### 6.2.1 A Christ-Centred Theology

Wu clearly holds Christ at the centre of his theological reflection, in which he discusses Christ as the centre, Christ's ideal world, and faith in Christ as the means of achieving an ideal world. This section will show that Wu's Christ-centred theology also reveals his approach towards the socio-political context.

#### Christ as the Centre

Wu frequently refers to Christ in his sermons, regarding Christ as the centre of his theological reflection. He states,

When we spread the gospel, we must understand a basic principle. It does not matter if there are miracles, food or rising up and walking. Jesus' miracles are not the core of the gospel. Rather, they are a means of manifesting the glory of God, demonstrating the abundant love of Jesus Christ and witnessing the authority of Jesus Christ. The core of the gospel is Jesus Christ: Jesus is the Son of God, and in him there is eternal life; both life and resurrection are dependent on the Lord Jesus Christ. This is rather the core of the gospel.<sup>3</sup>

Likewise, Wu insists that neither a loving heart nor charity work is the core of the gospel. Jesus Christ is 'the only core of the gospel.'<sup>4</sup> In line with this, Wu asserts that

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<sup>2</sup> Wu's sermon transcripts can be found online at <http://www.hdchurch.org/resource/sermon-archives>. In this chapter, all of Wu's sermon transcripts are from various volumes of *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons*] at the website.

<sup>3</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Ta Shuo: "Zhu A, Wo Xin", Jiu Bai Yesu' [He Said, 'Lord, I Believe.' And He Worshiped Him], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2013* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2013*], 214.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid.

the Christian's witness has its very core in messages like Jesus as Christ, the power of Christ's resurrection and salvation through faith in Christ.<sup>5</sup>

Wu's interest of Christ as the central role is not how the role may organise or fit into a sophisticated theological structure. Instead, Wu is keen to stress an imminent Christ who is living among Christians in local churches.<sup>6</sup> As living among them, Jesus understands and bears their suffering and brings them comfort.<sup>7</sup> Beyond the church, Wu describes Jesus' burden as being extended to all people, especially the poor. Jesus' heart is loaded with people's pain, hope and the desire for salvation.<sup>8</sup> He was born for the poor and he calls those who are weary and heavy-laden come and have rest in him (Matt.11:28).<sup>9</sup> His compassion for the poor is so real because he also experienced their life. As he did not have a house (Matt.8:20), Jesus is able to be compassionate towards migrant workers who endure the hardship of life in a big city like Beijing.<sup>10</sup> It seems that Wu himself holds compassion towards the poor as he frequently expresses concern about the latter. He regards migrant workers, who are poor peasants moving to cities to seek income through physical labour, as 'real people in real life.'<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Shen de Daneng' [God's Great Power], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2016* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2016*], 259.

<sup>6</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Yuan Nimen Pingan' [May Peace Be with You], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2013* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2013*], 77.

<sup>7</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Shen de Gaoyang-Renlei de Xiwang' [The Lamb of God-The Hope of Humankind], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2012* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2012*], 305.

<sup>8</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Yinwei Guodu, Quanbing, Rongyao, Quanshi Nide, Zhidao Yongyuan, Amen' [For Yours Is the Kingdom and the Power and the Glory Forever. Amen], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2017* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2017*], 93.

<sup>9</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Buyao Jupa' [Do Not Be Afraid], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2006* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2006*], 439.

<sup>10</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Qimiao de Ceshi' [Wonderful Counselor], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2017* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2017*], 21.

<sup>11</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Wenxing Zai Gaochu' [Walk on High Places], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2015* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2015*], 11.

Whereas an imminent Christ is compassionate towards Christians and the poor, Wu nevertheless sees a contrast between Christ and humans. In his preaching, Wu prefers the term 'Jesus Christ' rather than 'Jesus' or 'Christ.' This preference may reveal Wu's idea of emphasising simultaneously the humanity and the divinity of Jesus Christ. This simultaneous emphasis on the two natures of Jesus Christ may have been helpful for Wu to explain the sharp contrast between Jesus Christ and humans. As a human, Jesus has experienced the life on earth. Yet as a human who also possesses divine nature, he lives out a life that is strikingly contrasting to any other human being. This contrast can be seen from many examples. Considering the sinful nature of humankind, Wu illustrates that people may wish to cut those who hurt them into pieces. Jesus Christ is extremely different, as he still loved those who nailed him on the cross and prayed for them after his resurrection.<sup>12</sup> From a social perspective, Wu explains that humans have little honesty, especially in a society lacking credibility.<sup>13</sup> Christ the Word became flesh, lived among humans, experienced life and temptations, yet without sin. He understands how difficult it is for a sinner to get saved in a hypocritical society. Through his incarnation, life, death and resurrection, Jesus Christ commands the hypocritical people to remove their disguise and love one another.<sup>14</sup> From a cultural perspective, Wu states that traditional Chinese culture encourages people to become someone superior over other people (*ren shang ren*), and the only purpose of education is to gain wealth, power and a good life. Following this cultural mindset, people try hard to move

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<sup>12</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Dang Zhizhe Zhu Kuakou' [Boast in the Lord], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2016* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2016*], 243.

<sup>13</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Ai de Zhendi' [The True Meaning of Love], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2011* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2011*], 257.

<sup>14</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Dao Cheng Roushen' [The Word Became Flesh], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2017* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2017*], 11-12.

upward. Contrarily, Jesus Christ moves downward, humbly living among humans, helping the poor and setting free the captive.<sup>15</sup> Some people try hard to make friends with wealthy and powerful people, but Jesus Christ comes to Christians in the midst of their poverty, loneliness, weaknesses and helplessness, listening to their prayers and helping them as their friend.<sup>16</sup> People attract others by their authority, power and wealth, and Jesus Christ draws thousands of people to him by his death on the cross, which is ‘a shocking truth.’<sup>17</sup>

By providing a great number of examples, Wu effectively portrays a sharp contrast between Jesus Christ and humans. These examples reveal the God-and-man nature of Jesus Christ and the weaknesses of humankind. Yet Wu’s intent is pointing people towards Christ whose love, power and victory can cover their weaknesses and dismay. He explains that since Christ has gained the victory, Christians who trust in him in all things will be protected by his love.<sup>18</sup> They will be free from the temptations and bondages in the world.<sup>19</sup> When they take the heart of Christ, they will be able to resist the threats towards the church and the erosion from the culture and philosophy of the world.<sup>20</sup> In short, followers of Jesus Christ will be able to overcome their weaknesses and resist the bad influence from the world. Through his elaboration of the contrast between Jesus Christ and humans, Wu intends to direct

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<sup>15</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Yingxu de Fuyin’ [The Gospel of Promise], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2014* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2014*], 288.

<sup>16</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Ni Shi Wo Cangshen Chu’ [You Are My Hiding Place], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2010* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2010*], 39.

<sup>17</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Xiyin Wanren Lai Gui Wo’ [Draw All People to Myself], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2014* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2014*], 84.

<sup>18</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Jidutu de Ziyou’ [The Freedom of the Christian], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2017* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2017*], 266.

<sup>19</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Suoyi Shijie Jiu Hen Nimen’ [So the World Hates You], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2014* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2014*], 201.

<sup>20</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Yu Jidu Tongxin’ [Have the Mind of Christ], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2017* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2017*], 71.

people to Christ, who is the very core of the gospel and the very centre of Wu's theological reflection.

### Christ's Ideal World

With Christ at the centre of his thinking, Wu has in mind a world which Christ intends to establish. Before looking into Wu's description of this world, it should be noted that Wu expresses a great disappointment towards the current human world in general, Chinese society in particular. Wu discusses that although science and technology have been hugely improving, the world is still full of violence, and the intent of people's thoughts is evil continually.<sup>21</sup> In terms of morality and ethics, humanity has not really improved.<sup>22</sup> He observes various phenomena of disfavouring the poor and the underprivileged in today's China.<sup>23</sup> He refers to common examples like bosses' withholding migrant workers' salary, ridiculously high price real estate, unaffordable medical treatment and corruption of the medical system. Wu disapproves and describes these examples using a metaphor of wolves and lions eating each one of the masses.<sup>24</sup> He condemns these as greed, lawlessness, evil, exploitation and oppression, pointing out that social and economic disparity has become a serious problem.<sup>25</sup> Observing that law is not enforced and people like migrant workers have to acquire their salary through begging help from the prime

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<sup>21</sup> Wu Weiqing 'Jinru Fangzhou' [Entering the Ark], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2006* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2006*], 106.

<sup>22</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Ta Shi Shui' [Who Is He], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2005* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2005*], 68.

<sup>23</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Yesu de Quanbing' [Jesus' Authority], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2012* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2012*], 202.

<sup>24</sup> Wu, 'Ni Shi Wo,' 41.

<sup>25</sup> Wu Weiqing 'Baoming Shangce' [Be Registered], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2004* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2004*], 283.

minister, Wu laments that such society is dark.<sup>26</sup> Wu describes these as a general situation rather than random cases in the Chinese society. Looking up to Jesus Christ, the centre of Wu's thinking, he sees all these phenomena as unfair and unjust. He then appeals that “we as people in the world” (*women shiren*) have long been living in evil and darkness. The sin has been so grievous that it is time for the Chinese people to wake up towards God's righteousness.<sup>27</sup>

Having a great disappointment towards the current situation of moral deterioration and social injustice, Wu expresses a longing for a world which, according to Wu, Christ intends to establish. Wu has in view the beauty of the world created by God in its original form (Gen.1:11-13, 20-25). As an originally beautiful world has been revealed to humankind, Christians are obligated to take care of the world, in which they must endeavour to build a harmonious home for humankind.<sup>28</sup> Even though serious problems exist in the Chinese society, Wu insists that God the Father is still in control of everything, including human history and people's daily life.<sup>29</sup> In accordance with a Christ-centred theology, Wu explains that this kingdom of God has been given to Christ. Christ's kingdom has been existing since Jesus' birth. It has Christ as the cornerstone and built by his fragrance, which beats all the

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<sup>26</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Yao Jingguo Samaliya' [Must Go Through Samaritan], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2005* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2005*], 189.

<sup>27</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Xin de Shengming' [New Life], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2007* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2007*], 5.

<sup>28</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Shen Aomi Shi de Guanxia' [Stewards of the Mysteries of God], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2009* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2009*], 51, 54.

<sup>29</sup> For example, Wu sees God's sovereign control in the clampdown and the revivals of the Chinese churches during and after the Cultural Revolution. Wu Weiqing, 'Shui Zai Zhangguan' [Who Is in Control], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2014* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2014*], 11.

armies, vanity and noisiness in the world.<sup>30</sup> When the kingdom of Christ exists and prevails, what kind of world does Christ want to build? Wu describes,

He [Christ] wants to spread the gospel and the blessing of peace. He wants to build a world of love, mutual respect, tolerance and acceptance. The world is one of peace, joy, blessing and harmony when there are kings, shepherds, sheep, angels and God's only begotten Son. Through the incarnation of the Lord Jesus Christ, God wants to tell us that the world which He wants to build is not only mutual tolerance and acceptance but also without fear, discrimination and prejudice.<sup>31</sup>

This description basically refers to the loving aspect of Christ's intended world.

When there is love, there will be peace, mutual respect, tolerance, acceptance, and there will be no fear, no discrimination or prejudice. Yet Wu's concern is not limited to the loving aspect. He is also seriously concerned about justice and fairness in society. He understands that Christ wants to establish a world full of love and harmony, as well as a society of fairness and justice.<sup>32</sup> When Christians have the same mind as Christ's, they will pursue peace, correct wrong doing, support justice and build a fair and just society in which everyone can enjoy a 'peaceful kingdom in this era.'<sup>33</sup> Compared to love, social justice and fairness represent aspects of a just world. Thus, Wu's understanding of Christ's intended world is both loving and just.

However, regarding the just aspect, Wu finds the current world, particularly the Chinese society, unjust and disappointing. He describes the powerful people's definition of justice and fairness as 'the world is mine, not yours.' But the real justice and fairness, which Christ came to the world to realise, is: 'you have, and I have; we

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<sup>30</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Jidu Xinxiang Zhi Qi' [Christ's Fragrance], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2005* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2005*], 1.

<sup>31</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Shengdan de Shengying' [The Sound of Christmas], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2017* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2017*], 303.

<sup>32</sup> Wu, 'Yesu de Quanbing,' 202.

<sup>33</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Heping de Jun' [Prince of Peace], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2009* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2009*], 344.



people enjoy together.’<sup>34</sup> Obviously, the two definitions contradict each other.

Taking into account Wu’s earlier description of the current world, this contradiction indicates serious struggles and conflicts in the human world. As Wu sees the powerful people’s definition contradicting that of Christ’s, he speaks on behalf of the masses, even the marginalised. He expresses sympathy towards the poor and the underprivileged, and he seems to identify himself with the masses rather than with those in power.<sup>35</sup>

Helping the poor and the underprivileged has been a major theme in Wu’s thinking, while his church is located in Haidian district, which is resided by many urban intellectuals who study or work in universities and high-technology companies. One may wonder if this theme of Wu addresses his congregation. In Wu’s sermons, he nevertheless indicates that there are migrant people, the poor and the underprivileged in his congregation.<sup>36</sup> While they may just be the minority in Wu’s congregation, those urban intellectuals and white-collar workers may also bear various disadvantages in social life. Economically, they are not as poor as migrant workers. However, as long as they are not the privileged, they are vulnerable to power abuse from the privileged. They also face social problems like food poisoning,

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<sup>34</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Butong de Lu’ [Different Ways], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2011* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2011*], 319.

<sup>35</sup> Wu gives an example that he felt uncomfortable to be introduced to government officials during a wedding reception. He said to them, ‘I am a pastor. A pastor is to serve, not to sit in a high place.’ Wu Weiqing, ‘Rongyao Yu Shouku’ [Glory and Suffering], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2010* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2010*], 274.

<sup>36</sup> Wu, ‘Baoming,’ 283. Wu does not say that there are ‘peasant migrant workers’ (nongmin gong), but ‘people who migrate from other regions.’ It is likely that they are migrant intellectuals or university graduates who do not have certain rights and social benefits because they are not able to get registered as a Beijing household residence (Beijing *hukou*).

ridiculous housing price, unaffordable medical treatment and the unfair *hukou* system.<sup>37</sup>

Although being mindful of serious problems and conflicts in the world, Wu occasionally refers to China's construction of a 'harmonious society' (*hexie shehui*), a major official slogan promoted in China, especially when Hu Jintao was the president (2003-13). The slogan primarily refers to a socialist society which features, as usually propagandised, democracy and rule of law, fairness and justice, honesty, social vitality, stability and harmony between humans and nature.<sup>38</sup> Apparently, all the features are under the banner of socialism. Democracy is socialist democracy, and rule of law (*fazhi*) is further explained as rule by law (*yifa zhiguo*). By referring to the official slogan, Wu appreciates the goal of constructing a harmonious society in China. Wu's mention of the slogan may due to its inclusion of ideas like fairness, justice, honesty and harmony, which are essential in his understanding of Christ's intended world. The slogan may sound desirable to Wu also because harmony has been a traditional Confucian teaching and therefore appealing to Chinese people. However, despite Wu's occasional mention of the term 'harmonious society,' he does not explain it based on the state's official teaching. Nor does he explore any Confucian doctrine to support it. Instead, Wu criticises the state's doctrine of atheism as inducing people to fear nothing of deity, dare to do anything evil, therefore causing disharmony in society. He goes on to suggest atheistic education to be

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<sup>37</sup> The *hukou* system, which may be translated as household residence administrative system, is designed to register individuals' household residence. Under this system, any individuals who migrate to work or study in other administrative regions will not have certain rights and social benefits designated to that regions. In other words, they are underprivileged before they can ever get registered in their migrated administrative regions.

<sup>38</sup> 'Six Major Characteristics of a Harmonious Society,' People, accessed 10 October 2018, <http://politics.people.com.cn/GB/8198/70195/index.html>.

removed from the country so that both people's life and society can become healthy.<sup>39</sup>

Since Wu sees powerful people's definition of justice and fairness as contradicting Christ's definition, it makes sense that when he employs the term 'harmonious society,' he is not interested in how it has been officially taught. Instead, he explains it from a Christian perspective. For example, Wu points to Christ's teaching of forgiveness in Matthew 6:12 as a way of contributing to a harmonious society. He explains that forgiveness will bring about compassion and then harmony among people.<sup>40</sup> Wu may consider 'harmonious society' as a contact point between Christian belief and the state's slogan. Occasional reference of the slogan may be helpful to present him and Haidian church as politically correct, and it can also provide some flexible space for Wu to deliver relevant Christian messages in his sermons. Eventually, Wu draws his understanding of a harmonious society from the Christian concept of love, justice and fairness, rather than from socialist ideology or Confucian doctrine.

Wu understands Christ's intended world as one of love, fairness and justice, and he envisions a Christian version of a harmonious society. This Christ intended world is highly contrasted to the current world, therefore, it looks extraordinarily ideal. Nonetheless, Wu indicates that this ideal world will be realised on earth. He states that when Christ returns, Christians will hand over the account (*jiao zhang*), and the account will be perfect.<sup>41</sup> Wu does not explain what 'account' refers to,

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<sup>39</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Quanbing Yu Shengming' [Authority and Life], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2013* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2013*], 99.

<sup>40</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Yi Jiang Wanyou Jiaozai Ta Shouli' [Has Given All Things into His Hand], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2012* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2012*], 239.

<sup>41</sup> Wu, 'Shen Aomi Shi,' 51.

though it may refer to the Christian's account of life, account of duty or account of the world. Nor does Wu explain the meaning that the account will be 'perfect.' Yet, from his explanation of the word 'righteousness' in Matthew 6:33, Wu indicates, 'You have, I also have. If you are poor, I will also experience poverty with you. In this world created by Christ, there will be no more suffering, homelessness, hatred, killing, or unfair things.'<sup>42</sup> When all these are solved, it will certainly be a perfect world intended by Christ, and Wu implies that this perfect world will be realised before Christ returns.

Topics like Christ's second coming and millennialism have been politically sensitive in TSPM churches.<sup>43</sup> Although Wu mentions once Christ's return, he may tend to avoid talking about millennialism. However, his description of an ideal, even perfect world, suggests that he holds a view of millennialism. Further, his idea of a 'perfect account' and a world on earth without suffering, homelessness, hatred, killing and unfair things suggest that Wu holds a view of postmillennialism, which asserts that Christ will return after the millennial kingdom. In other words, the world will progress gradually, becoming better and better, and the millennial kingdom will be realised on earth before Christ's second coming. Although Wu perceives the current world as suffering from moral deterioration and social injustice, he believes that the world can be and will be changed dramatically, and it will reach a point of ideal before Christ's second coming. One may question about Wu's Evangelical position as he seems to follow postmillennialism, which is not commonly held by Evangelicals. In this sense, Wu indicates certain degree of complexity in the idea of a

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<sup>42</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Guizhong de Liwu' [Precious Gift], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2010* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2010*], 347.

<sup>43</sup> Wickeri, *Seeking the Common Ground*, 263. See also Alan Hunter and Kim-Kwong Chan, *Protestantism in Contemporary China* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), 76.

particular Evangelical. Nevertheless, he fits in Kevin Xiyi Yao's working definition of Chinese Evangelical tradition, which includes, as noted earlier in the present thesis, upholding the authority of the Bible, emphasising evangelism and a Christocentric message.

### Faith in Christ as the Solution

When Christ's intended world is this ideal, one may ask what the way of realising it may be. It should be noted that Wu does not propose a world of abundant wealth for everyone. What he is concerned about the most is love, fairness and justice. Meanwhile, his idea of bearing poverty with the poor suggests an ethical choice rather than some sort of policy of egalitarianism or equal distribution of wealth. He promotes Christian love and principles rather than any other ideology or cultural tradition. With regard to the realisation of an ideal world, Wu seems to have a firm answer. He does not employ deep analysis or strong argument. Rather, he simply asserts that faith in Christ will solve the problems—when people come to faith in Christ, the world will then be changed.

This confidence of Wu first comes from his understanding of who Christ is. Wu states that based on Jesus' life, death, resurrection, his experience and victory on earth as the Son of man, Jesus has become 'the only answer for all the problems, struggles, difficulties, challenges and tests in our life.'<sup>44</sup> Wu also asserts that Christ is the source of life and wisdom.<sup>45</sup> In Christ there is hope, peace, joy, abundant and

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<sup>44</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Wo Kaozhe Na Jiagei Wo Liliang de, Fanshi Dou Neng Zuo' [I Can Do All Things Through Him Who Strengthens Me], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2017* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2017*], 286.

<sup>45</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Hai Yao Zai Ke' [Will Still Be Thirsty], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2012* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2012*], 244.

eternal life.<sup>46</sup> When Christ is the only answer and the only source, what is required of Christians is their faith in Christ. In other words, faith in Christ is sufficient. In a crisis of disease outbreak, like SARS in 2003, Wu comments that what Christians can do is to pray continuously and appeal to people coming to know Christ. His reasoning is that since Christ suffered and died for humankind, the only thing that is required of people is to know Christ as their Saviour.<sup>47</sup> Faith in Christ is sufficient in time of crisis.

How then can faith in Christ relate to changing the world? Wu's discussion about the wise men worshipping the baby Jesus brings clues. Wu states, 'If people in the world today are all willing to do so [worship Jesus], then will our world not become one of just, peace, benevolence and love? Because we will learn humility by worshipping the little baby. We will learn not only humility but also godliness.'<sup>48</sup> In other words, by worshipping Jesus Christ, people will learn humility and godliness, from which they will practice love and justice in the world. Wu insists that people's conversion to Christ will itself change the world, bringing about a fair, just and compassionate society.<sup>49</sup> These changes take place in the converted. When people are converted to the Christian faith, the world will be changed in the sense that there are more Christians who live a new life of love, fairness and justice.

Besides changes on the converted, Wu also sees changes that Christians may bring upon their surrounding context. Wu sees Jesus as an example of bringing

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<sup>46</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Cong Zhu Lai de Panwang' [Hope from the Lord], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2012* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2012*], 295.

<sup>47</sup> Wu Weiqing 'Yi Li Maizi' [A Wheat], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2003* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2003*], 105. SARS refers to severe acute respiratory syndrome. SARS was a disease outbreak which happened across mainland China, Hong Kong, Taiwan, south-east Asia regions and some countries over the world from November 2002 to July 2003. The outbreak claimed hundreds of lives and caused international panic.

<sup>48</sup> Wu, 'Guizhong,' 348.

<sup>49</sup> Wu, 'Baoming,' 284.

impact. The birth of Jesus is to bring ‘positive energy’ (*zheng nengliang*), a popular term used in current China, of loving one another, helping one another and having compassion towards one another.<sup>50</sup> While people become cold in their hearts and justice is lost, Jesus set many examples of love, kindness, fairness and justice. As Jesus has set the example, Christians are to practice their faith and pursue fairness and justice in the world.<sup>51</sup> Wu notes the oppression that Christians sometimes go through and the difficulty in bringing influence upon the world. Yet Christians do not face oppression or the world alone, for Christ is their comfort and strength, and he fights and wins the battles for them.<sup>52</sup> They may face oppression, temptation of the flesh and unfair and unjust things in the world. Yet when they trust in Christ, they are more than conquerors in all these things (Rom.8:37).<sup>53</sup>

From another angle, Wu explains that problems occur because people do not believe in Jesus. He points to the lack of conscience and morality in the whole society and laments that people do evil things without any sense of remorse. Employing a metaphor, Wu’s explanation is that because people live in a tomb sealed with a big rock, in which Christ cannot be released, they cannot come face to face with Christ.<sup>54</sup> To put it plainly, people practice evil without remorse because they do not know or believe in Jesus. In other words, moral and social problems exist because people do not come to faith in Christ. If the absence of faith is the reason or the cause, then faith in Christ is the solution. Wu explains further,

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<sup>50</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘De Zuihao de Liwu’ [Receiving the Best Gift], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2013* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2013*], 335.

<sup>51</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Jingli Fuhuo de Daneng’ [Experiencing the Power of Resurrection], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2012* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2012*], 88-89.

<sup>52</sup> Wu, ‘Yao Jingguo,’ 189.

<sup>53</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Jidu Yi Wei Women Desheng’ [Christ Has Gained the Victory for Us], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2015* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2015*], 292.

<sup>54</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Ya Shang de Luwei Ta Bu Zheduan’ [A Bruised Reed He Will Not Break], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2011* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2011*], 104.

If the problem of sin is solved and people no longer sin, there will be no fake or poisoning food on our tables; if the problem of sin is solved, then the boss will treat the staff with a loving heart, for they are to build a loving relationship. Jesus Christ came to the world not only to save us from physical suffering, but also to reconcile sinful people to God and make them new creature. When these happen, everyone will be kind-hearted, loving one another, and people will not be attacking or harming one another. There will be no toxic stuff in our food, and people's life will become harmonious.<sup>55</sup>

In this statement, solving the problem of sin does not refer to the Christian's process of sanctification. Instead, Wu refers it to people's reconciliation to God and their becoming new creatures in Christ. In other words, when Wu discusses the problem of sin being solved, he refers to people's conversion to Christ. In view of this, what Wu indicates in the statement is that when people come to faith in Christ and get their problem of sin solved, all the moral and social problems will be solved, and a harmonious society will be built.

However, Wu's reasoning contains an assumption that one day the majority, if not all people in the world, will become Christians. This assumption is rather a necessary condition because it is Christians who get their problem of sin solved and practice love and justice in their lives. Yet in view of the whole church history, this assumption does not seem realistic. While Christians may bring impact upon their immediate surroundings, Wu does not offer a particular approach of extending the impact to the whole world or the whole society. Wu discusses little about how Christians, as the minority, even the oppressed in the Chinese society, may deal with the evil that numerous non-Christians are doing in the world. His application of 'more than conquerors in all these things (Rom. 8:37)' on problems like moral deterioration and social injustice in current China sound noble, but it does not

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<sup>55</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Wei Ye Lu Sa Leng Kuqi' [Crying for Jerusalem], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2013* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2013*], 73.



include specific, practical instructions. In view of this, Wu places priority on people's conversion to Christ rather than on Christians' outward impact upon the wider society. This explains why Wu considers faith in Christ, rather than a particular approach of engagement, as the solution to the problems and a means to change the world.

### 6.2.2 The Christian's Responsibility

The previous information shows that Wu has Christ at the centre of his theological thoughts, portraying an ideal world of Christ and proposing faith in Christ as the solution to all the problems related to morality and social justice. Under this Christ-centred theology, Wu also stresses the Christian's responsibility, by which he discusses the Christian's role and practice.

#### The Role of The Christian

As Christ is the central focus of Wu's theological reflection, he also describes the Christian's role of imitating Christ. He envisions that in a world with many pollutions, obstacles, oppression and temptations, Christ is the star penetrating the dark and leading Christians forward. Likewise, every Christian should also be a star that penetrates the dark and leads people to Christ.<sup>56</sup> As Christ has won the world not by sword but by his mercy, compassion and gentleness, the Christian, who is full of mercy, can conquer the world, winning people and leading them to Christ.<sup>57</sup> Wu also sees the Christian as a servant of Christ. Like a servant follows the master, every follower of Christ should be an ambassador of the Gospel, going into the world

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<sup>56</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Boli heng zhi Xing' [The Star of Bethlehem], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2008* [Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2008], 339.

<sup>57</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Gezi Ban Jiangxia' [Descending Like A Dove], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2008* [Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2008], 312.

rather than being separated from it.<sup>58</sup> Wu's view of the Christian's imitation of Christ focuses on its impact upon the world, and the impact basically refers to people's conversion to Christ. In other words, Wu understands that a basic impact of the Christian's imitation of Christ is winning people to Christ.

As Wu is seriously concerned about the Chinese society, he bears in mind the Christian's role towards the latter. He states that Christians are 'the vanguard of the time,' which means that they should 'explain to people the things that are in accordance with the will of God, and what people may do to improve society.'<sup>59</sup> Wu also explains that Christians' duty is to be 'prophets and servants of the time.' By taking these roles, they are to lead more people to Christ and to manifest the glory of Christ in this dark time.<sup>60</sup> Here Wu includes three points: the Christian's explanation of godly things, advice for improving society and manifestation of the glory of Christ in the world. All of these are about the Christian's role of influencing the world outside the church, despite that Wu does not explain further any particular approach or strategy.

Wu's description of the Christian's role, though pointing to the Christian's potential contribution, does not necessarily indicate a good or easy relationship between the Christian and the world. Instead, Wu considers the Christian's role revealing his or her difference and struggle with the world. He describes that people have become pragmatic, materialistic and profit-driven, falling into idolatry under power and materialism. Christians in this 'bleak land' should proclaim the gospel

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<sup>58</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'A Strategy for Planting A New Church in Haidian District' (DMin diss., Fuller Theological Seminary, 2015), 1.

<sup>59</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Shitou Yijing Gunkai' [The Stone Has Been Rolled Away], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2002* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2002*], 37.

<sup>60</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Yehehua Yile' [Jehovah-Jireh], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2002* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2002*], 41, 42.

and drive away idols.<sup>61</sup> Yet in doing so, they will go through many tests in their spiritual life. Then they will grow to be God's instruments, to challenge and change the world, to spread the gospel, which the world does not believe nor like.<sup>62</sup>

Christians will certainly encounter opposition and difficult situations. Wu explains that sometimes he has a sense of loneliness because God sends him to proclaim a message that is totally different from this bustling world. Wu feels that he is in a one man's war.<sup>63</sup> In this lonely situation, Wu describes the church as a spiritual home, like a refuge, for Christians.<sup>64</sup> In his discussion of the Christian's role as an imitator of Christ, vanguard, prophet and servant of the time, Wu on the one hand explicitly expresses his concern and motivation of changing the world. Yet on the other hand, he senses serious obstacles from the world.

### The Practice of The Christian

Understanding the Christian's role as both imitating Christ and impacting the world, Wu discusses the Christian's practice for fulfilling this role. He values the Christian's devotional life. Wu believes that when Christians get close to God through Christ, they will become as holy as Christ, and their nature will then be changed.<sup>65</sup> As disciples of Christ, they must die to the world, to pride, to worries and to all the material things that may lure them into mammonism.<sup>66</sup> Because Christians

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<sup>61</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Yisaiya de Huhan' [Isaiah's Shout], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2004* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2004*], 270.

<sup>62</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Man Le Ba Tian' [At the End of Eight Days], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2012* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2012*], 5.

<sup>63</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Yi Ge Ren de Zhanzheng' [One Person's War], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2007* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2007*], 220-21.

<sup>64</sup> Wu, 'Man Le,' 6.

<sup>65</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Yesu de Yaoqing' [Jesus' Invitation], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2015* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2015*], 197-98.

<sup>66</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Mentu de Daijia' [The Cost of Discipleship], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2014* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2014*], 78.

are born again, they are to get rid of all the tangles in the world and live to God alone.<sup>67</sup> Wu emphasises that Christians shall make effort in their devotional life. In the long-term spiritual life, they should on the one hand, obey God's words, trust in His will and rely on His power, and on the other hand, be working hard on their part.<sup>68</sup> Wu understands that Christians are invited to co-work with God and participate in God's work of salvation.<sup>69</sup> In this devotional life, Wu emphasises the Christian's change toward holiness and his or her deliberate effort in the process. Wu's emphasis on the Christian's devotional life is essential, as he proposes faith in Christ as the solution to moral and social problems, and the spiritual growth and maturity of the converted will directly affect the effectiveness of the solution.

While the Christian's devotional life is essential, Wu also considers necessary the Christian's practice of faith outside the church. By doing this, Christians extend their faith into 'real life.'<sup>70</sup> This extension has particular implications to the Chinese society. Wu explains that by imitating Christ and modelling a good example through good deeds, Christians set a high moral standard for people in the world to follow. In this way, Christians push forward to rebuild conscience, morality and love in society.<sup>71</sup> Wu highly values the Christian's faith practice outside the church since the world is the real field in which Christians need to bring about influence and change.

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<sup>67</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Cong Ling Sheng de, Jiushi Ling' [Which Is Born of the Spirit Is Spirit], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2012* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2012*], 214.

<sup>68</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Zhao Shende Zhiyi Xing' [Practice According to the Will of God], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2016* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2016*], 121.

<sup>69</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Meiyong Shenme Neng Shi Women Yu Jidu de Ai Gejue' [Nothing Can Separate Us from the Love of Christ], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2013* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2013*], 268.

<sup>70</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Chongshen Yueding' [Reaffirming the Covenant], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2016* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2016*], 216-17.

<sup>71</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Bushu Yao Ding Shiren de Zui' [Not to Judge People's Sin], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2012* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2012*], 226.

As the senior pastor of Haidian church, Wu also discusses the Christian's practice from a perspective of the church. He explains the practice of the church in relation to the Great Commission. Wu acknowledges that Haidian church has been a sending church—a church living out the Great Commission by going out to spread the Gospel.<sup>72</sup> In his DMin dissertation on church planting, Wu explains that Haidian church endeavours to shift the church's mission impetus from traditional 'evangelistic-attractional' to 'missional-incarnational,' which features a centrifugal mission of going out rather than calling in.<sup>73</sup>

Besides the Great Commission, Wu calls for the church's practice in the wider society. He explains people's expectation towards the church regarding moral and social problems. Wu states,

Facing a deteriorating human society of ever-increasing divorce rates, unbearable and polluted living environments and an ever-increasing greed to get rich over-night due to a lack of faith and the demolition of traditional value systems, many people from almost all walks of life came to the Church for possible solution. They trust that the Church could be the moral and ethical shrine where the bottom line of moral conduct was still maintained and stood fast, where faith and values could be reconstructed and reinforced and where a proper human society could be reinvented.<sup>74</sup>

To put it in a nutshell, people expect that faith and morality offered by the church can help reinvent a proper human society. Wu explains that when severe problems like poisoning food, industrial accidents and government departments malfunctioning tend to paralyse the society, the church is to be loving and shining as light in this 'era of paralysis.'<sup>75</sup> How can the church be loving and shining in this world? Wu discusses Christians' good deeds toward their neighbours. He explains

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<sup>72</sup> Wu, 'A Strategy,' 93.

<sup>73</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>74</sup> Ibid., 100.

<sup>75</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Bi Shi Da Chi Bian' [By the Pool of Bethesda], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2008* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2008*], 254.

that as a local church is to be missional and incarnational, apart from a commitment to the spread of the Gospel, church members should also take ‘the initiative in living out the Christian faith as people loving and caring for their immediate neighbors.’<sup>76</sup> The church should be able to meet people’s felt needs through actions like offering healing and feeding the hungry.<sup>77</sup> By meeting the needs of its neighbours, helping the poor and upholding social justice, Wu presents that Haidian church has been a ‘social justice sensitive church.’<sup>78</sup> With regard to some specific issues, Wu discusses ways that Haidian church can help. He states that the pastoral team should support young hard-working employees to achieve their legitimate goal of obtaining *hukou* of Beijing, namely, becoming citizens of Beijing. Regarding wealth distribution, Wu suggests the church to form a pastoral network to deal with the retiring people’s disappointment and despair caused by low pension and an unfair social income distribution structure.<sup>79</sup> Here Wu’s advice and suggestions are mainly in the form of charity work and pastoral support, rather than direct interaction with social and political entities. Wu seems to indicate that the poor and the underprivileged are the victims of social injustice. By helping them through charity work and pastoral support, the church is then helping to improve the situation.

Keeping in mind these various burdens, Wu emphasises the importance of Christians’ participation in the church.<sup>80</sup> He criticises cultural Christians’ non-participating attitude and avoidance of public profession of faith.<sup>81</sup> He states that

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<sup>76</sup> Wu, ‘A Strategy,’ 2.

<sup>77</sup> Ibid., 29.

<sup>78</sup> Ibid., 82, 87.

<sup>79</sup> Ibid., 77.

<sup>80</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Yehehua Shi Quanneng de’ [Jehovah Is Almighty], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2016* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2016*], 11.

<sup>81</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Wo Dou Qian Tamen de Zai’ [I Am Under Obligation to Them], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2011* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2011*], 68.

‘churches should be proud of the cross rather than hiding it from the world. The Church actively should take part in social activities to show the living and loving Jesus by living out their faith whenever possible.’<sup>82</sup> Meanwhile, Wu sees that God wants to train Christians and make the church a ‘community (*qunti*),’ which is able to change the present society.<sup>83</sup> Thus, Wu views the church as a Christian community, and this community shall change the world rather than hide the cross from it.

These two points of Wu sound similar with Sun Yi’s understanding of the church’s integrity and openness. What makes it more interesting is that Wu’s Haidian church and Sun’s Shouwang church were previously down the same street before Shouwang church was shut down. Wu and Sun reflect on the same socio-political context from the same geographical street. Under a generally Evangelical perspective, they share similar thoughts on the church’s active role and responsibility toward the wider society. They both believe that the church should publicly engage with and impact the world.

However, their differences are also obvious. Perhaps the most obvious difference is that while Sun explicitly looks for theological insights, especially understanding of the purposes of the church from Neo-Calvinism, Wu does not identify a theological tradition as his source of reflection. Broadly speaking, Wu’s theology presents an Evangelical perspective, but he does not indicate any further particularity of his theological preference. Another important difference is that they take different directions in socio-political engagement. Whereas Sun proposes the

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<sup>82</sup> Wu, ‘A Strategy,’ 149.

<sup>83</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Mei Ge Ren Doushi Tianshi’ [Every Person Is An Angel], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji* 2009 [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons* 2009], 264.

church to set a good model of high morality and proper organisational polity for people and social groups to follow, Wu emphasises the church's network of support in dealing with social injustice. Wu mentions the church being a model of high moral standard, but he is silent on modelling a proper church or organisational polity. In this sense, while they both observe serious socio-political problems, they have taken different directions: Sun aims to impact the social elites, and Wu stresses on helping the poor and the underprivileged. The third major difference, as related to the second one, is that while Sun explores both the church's public nature and integrity, Wu places his primary interest in the church's open engagement with the society. Wu has in mind the church as a Christian community and its responsibility, but he does not develop his thought on how the church may be built through proper church polity or institutionalisation.

There is an underlying reason that causes the differences between Wu and Sun, as well as between Haidian church and Shouwang church: while Sun serves in an unregistered house church, Wu works within the TSPM system. As Shouwang church is not legally recognised, it is therefore not running according to the government's regulation and restriction. Sun feels free to explore theological traditions and express his preference. In the case of Wu, it is not permissible for him to propose a particular theological tradition because the TSPM has officially brought the Chinese church into a so-called post-denominational era. Wu and Sun's difference in directions of social engagement can also be explained by their church backgrounds. While Sun feels free to explore theological traditions, he also brings into practice his theological conviction. With a basis in Neo-Calvinism, Sun's proposal of impacting social elites may present the church as a strong rivalry to the



government therefore causing oppression. Yet, he is willing to take the risk. In the case of Wu, helping the poor and the underprivileged is considered charity work and pastoral support, which have been low-profile and permissible in the TSPM system. It is true that charity work and pastoral support can help reduce social unfairness and injustice by providing limited economic resources and counselling to the poor and the underprivileged. Yet, taking into consideration Wu's maintenance of a friendly relationship with local authorities, his direction of engaging with the poor and the underprivileged, instead of the social or political elites, has been affected by his position in the TSPM system. For the difference on church integrity, Wu and Sun's choices also reflect their different church backgrounds. Sun and Shouwang church are not regulated by the TSPM, and they can design and develop their church polity. In Wu's case, as Haidian church is under the TSPM, it is not permissible for him to develop a church polity that is not on track with the TSPM.

### 6.2.3 Church-State Relationship, Oppression and Suffering

Wu has been a pastor and a *lianghui* leader while holding political positions in local levels. Holding dual roles, Wu advocates a reciprocal relationship between the church and the state. On the one hand, the church consists of Christians who are citizens of the state and have the duty to pray for the nation to develop in a healthy and better way. On the other hand, the state should provide peaceful and happy living environment for its people, including those from the church community.<sup>84</sup> Related to praying for the nation, Wu understands the word 'our' in the Lord's prayer, 'our Father,' as referring to not only Christians but also unknown people on the street and

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<sup>84</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Heyi Zhi Fen' [Proper Duty], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2017* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2017*], 235.

those who have not known Christ but with whom Christians will share the gospel. Wu explains that these words include all people in the Christian's prayer.<sup>85</sup> Wu's inclusion does not seem necessary, because without the inclusion in the Lord's prayer, Christians can still pray for non-Christians. Yet with this inclusion, Wu intends to admonish Christians to include the nation and its people in their concern and prayer. Firstly, this inclusion encourages Christians' work of evangelisation, as Christ is determined to be patient so that all people will have opportunity to get saved.<sup>86</sup> Secondly, the inclusion will be helpful to foster a reciprocal relationship between the church and the state, as Christians are reminded to pray for all the people of the nation.

With a view of reciprocity, Wu does not discuss much from the side of the state. Instead, he explains the value of the church keeping a friendly relationship with local authorities. In his DMin dissertation regarding planting a new church in Haidian district, Wu encourages:

goodwill visits to the Neighborhood Administrative Office, the local police station and the community police. The purpose of these meetings is to convince civil servants that Xi Sanqi Church is here to benefit the community and neighborhood by responding positively and actively to calls from local grassroots-level administrative units to get involved with charity related social services. The visit to the local police station is assurance that the existence of a three-self principle-based church would help resist the disturbances caused by so-called house churches and bring stability and unity to the area. The church is a positive and beneficial social force.<sup>87</sup>

Wu explains that through goodwill visits, the church intends to inform local officials its desire to 'work hand-in-hand with the local community office regarding social

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<sup>85</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Women Zai Tianshang de Fu' [Our Father in Heaven], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2003* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2003*], 135.

<sup>86</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Wo Rennai Nimen Yao Dao Jishi Ne' [How Long Am I To Bear with You], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2002* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2002*], 51.

<sup>87</sup> Wu, 'A Strategy,' 114.

stability and social justice.’<sup>88</sup> Besides, goodwill visits will also enhance mutual understanding between the church and the state, and they are good opportunities to present Christians’ loving hearts toward non-Christians.<sup>89</sup> With this thought, Wu encourages pastors ‘to master the skills of dealing with local government officials.’<sup>90</sup> It seems that Wu intends to take the possible advantages of a state-sanctioned church, utilising its legal status to conduct social services, to positively present the church to civil authorities and to promote the Christian’s message.

Meanwhile, Wu criticises a fairly large majority of Christians in China, mostly those who attend house churches, for perceiving the atheistic government as ‘wrong and evil’ and condemning any cooperation with the government as ‘dancing with wolves.’ Wu states that this view results in a ‘difficult and awkward relationship’ between the church and the state.<sup>91</sup> With regard to a former house church leader who intends to join the prospective church planted by Haidian church, Wu comments that three-self churches and house churches ‘can be one united family so long as there is trust in the same Lord, a shared faith and that all are baptized in the name of Jesus Christ.’ In this unity, Wu believes that Christians need not ‘to be swayed or manipulated by political differences.’<sup>92</sup> That being said, Wu views unity in Christ more important than political differences. At the same time, Wu seems to imply that political differences, rather than theological differences, are the reason that divides the Protestant church in China. Perhaps what Wu has in mind is that most Christians are Evangelical in theology, despite their different backgrounds of

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<sup>88</sup> Ibid., 134.

<sup>89</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>90</sup> Ibid., 119.

<sup>91</sup> Ibid., 150.

<sup>92</sup> Ibid., 128.

either Three-Self churches or house churches. In other words, to Wu, the fundamentalist-modernist controversy no longer influences the Chinese Protestants as most of them are Evangelicals. The cause of a division between Three-Self churches and house churches may just be political concern like church-state relationship.

Although Wu perceives a reciprocal church-state relationship and tries to utilise the legal status of Haidian church, he nevertheless expresses criticism against civil authorities on religious matters. He criticises that civil authorities abuse power, using violent and institutional means to force Christians to stay away from God.<sup>93</sup> They are not happy to see Christians growing in faith and the church multiplying in number. Wu reasons that people with authority hate Christ's followers because Christ has won the victory in contending with the world. He describes further, 'for the gospel of Christ causes pricking to the heart, people of the world resist it. When they see a cross hanging in a place high above the ground, as a light shining around, calling God's beloved yet lost, they want to remove that cross.'<sup>94</sup> Here Wu seems to have in mind the cross-removal campaign in Zhejiang province at the time, yet he does not spell it out explicitly, probably concerned with his position as a pastor and leader of local *lianghui*. Wu tries to be discreet in his talk against civil authorities, but still his thought has been revealed on various occasions. In his DMin dissertation, which was submitted in November 2015, Wu states,

Since 1949, the Church in China has undergone such movements as sinicization and indigenization with a view to have the Church contextualized culturally in general, and politically in particular. It has been a political movement so as to make all Christians patriotic citizens of China first, who support the leadership of the Communist party, and then a person of faith.

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<sup>93</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Desheng de Yaojue' [The Secret of Victory], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2016* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2016*], 181.

<sup>94</sup> Wu, 'Suoyi Shijie Jiu Hen Nimen,' 202.

Contextualization is necessary so that the cultural layers of Christianity can be stripped off and the core of Christianity, which is faith only in Christ, can be presented. Though particular or extreme political situations must be taken into consideration, faith in Christ shall never be secondary or replaced by political allegiance.<sup>95</sup>

This attitude of Wu was revealed much earlier in one of his sermons, in which he admonished that Christians should not fear. Their faith should not be controlled by powerful authorities, nor should they be influenced by authorities or zeitgeist.<sup>96</sup> Up to this point, Wu seems to feel free, at least relatively, to express his view and criticism against political authorities.

However, in March 2016, four months after the submission of Wu's dissertation, a contradictory statement of Wu was reported and published on the website of British Broadcasting Company (BBC). Wu was reported saying in an interview conducted by a foreign journalist, 'We have to remember first of all we are a citizen of this country. And we are a citizen of the kingdom of God. That comes second.' Then the journalist asked Wu, 'If Jesus were alive today, do you think he would be comfortable with the Communist Party government in China?' Wu's reply 'comes without hesitation: "Absolutely. I think so".'<sup>97</sup> Based on the article and the video clip published on the BBC website, it is not known if Wu's first statement was his answer to the journalist's particular question, or just a speech initiated by himself. If Wu was answering the journalist's question, it is still not known if the journalist asked Wu to choose which one comes first, this country or the kingdom of God. Wu

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<sup>95</sup> Wu, 'A Strategy,' 72.

<sup>96</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Biladuo de Wenti' [Pilate's Problem], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2005* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2005*], 78.

<sup>97</sup> John Sudworth, 'Why Many Christians in China Have Turned to Underground Churches,' BBC News, 26 March 2016, <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-asia-china-35900242>.

might give such a statement under political pressure, but this statement certainly contradicts what he professed in his dissertation.

Wu on the one hand views the church-state relationship as reciprocal, on the other hand he realises the church-state tension and goes through struggle with political powers. The tension and struggle exist in both Three-Self churches and house churches, though to different extents. Thinking of what Christianity has gone through in a hostile political context in China, Wu holds the Christian's experience of oppression and suffering in high regard. He explains that suffering under oppression during the Cultural Revolution taught Christians endurance, and it did not damage but motivate the growth of churches.<sup>98</sup> When Haidian church reopened in 1979, Christians prayed that oppression and suffering would not stop because they considered suffering under oppression a great opportunity to live out Christ in daily life. Oppression strengthened their faith and encouraged the sharing of experiences as testimonies.<sup>99</sup> Wu understands that God's logic is to let Christians experience suffering, yet strengthen their faith, help them to fight and win battles and receive God's blessings. God's order is reserving the best until the end.<sup>100</sup> This understanding of Wu is highly similar with Lin Xiangao's thought that God's principle is sweetness comes after bitterness.

Wu has positively reflected on oppression and suffering of the church during the Cultural Revolution. However, Wu's reflection is basically based on knowledge rather than his personal experience. According to available information, Wu was

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<sup>98</sup> Wu, 'A Strategy,' 59.

<sup>99</sup> Ibid., 21-22.

<sup>100</sup> Wu Weiqing, 'Ta Gaosu Nimen Shenme, Nimen Jiu Zuo Shenme' [Do Whatever He Tells You], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2012* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2012*], 191, 192.

only fifteen when Haidian church reopened in 1979, and he went to study in NUTS in mid-1980s and started church ministry after that. Belonging to a younger generation, Wu has not experienced the same oppression and suffering as Wang Weifan and Lin Xiangao did.

Nevertheless, Wu has something to say about Haidian church in his generation. He states that Christians in China today affirm their suffering as facing ‘political hardship and cultural difficulties.’<sup>101</sup> Regarding ‘political hardship,’ Wu exposes his feeling towards the restrictions upon Haidian church, ‘As the senior pastor, I feel confined in a box of restrictions, laws and regulations every day in ministry. I must try to push the walls back before they are closing in. I must figure out where the red lines are to see what would happen to the church if they are violated.’<sup>102</sup> Here restrictions on ministry are understood as a kind of political hardship, which Haidian church has been enduring. Yet Wu states that Christians are called to endure hardship, to spread the Gospel and to fulfil God’s plans.<sup>103</sup> He explains that Haidian church is trying to ‘release the power of the Cross from inside the box of restrictions.’<sup>104</sup> However, he admits that due to limited number of churches in China, Haidian church has been operating on a ‘come-to-us basis,’ and it is ‘still not fully’ following Christ’s teaching of going out to fulfil the Great Commission.<sup>105</sup>

Although enduring political hardship like restrictions on ministry, Wu does not explain what particular oppression he or members of Haidian church have

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<sup>101</sup> Wu, ‘A Strategy,’ 60-61.

<sup>102</sup> Ibid., 42.

<sup>103</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Shen de Jiaohui’ [God’s Church], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2016* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2016*], 225.

<sup>104</sup> Wu, ‘A Strategy,’ 29.

<sup>105</sup> Ibid., 51-52.

undergone. This may indicate that under Wu's careful conduct, the 'red lines' have not been violated. In view of this, Christians of Haidian church may not be as free as they wish in terms of faith expression and ministry, but the hardship of theirs is certainly not parallel with the oppression and suffering that leaders and members of a house church, like Shouwang church, may have gone through. Wu values the Christian's suffering under oppression, but sometimes his claim sounds rather unconvincing. For example, Wu states,

Though located in a high-tech area geographically, surrounded by top secular universities and scientific institutions, disturbed every day by the noise and excitement from the neighboring commercial market, Haidian Church is not determined be distracted [sic] by the world. Instead, the church is committed to a Cross-centered Gospel in self-denial, suffering and joy by making it the main goal in daily decisions and daily living and to die to the world and to be a martyr for Christ.<sup>106</sup>

It was noted earlier that Wu highly regards the oppression and suffering endured by the older generation Christians during the Cultural Revolution, and he seems to be trying to inherit their legacy learned from oppression and suffering. However, a statement like 'be a martyr for Christ' sounds vague and unconvincing, given that, according to Wu, Haidian church has nevertheless been 'running inside the box of restrictions.'<sup>107</sup> In other words, the leadership of Haidian church has willingly accepted those restrictions and run the church accordingly. When Wu and the church try to avoid testing the 'red lines,' it is hard to imagine that they may wish to be oppressed to the point of being a martyr for Christ. Perhaps another statement of Wu's explains fairly the situation: 'various persecutions during the Cultural Revolution, big social changes and continued pressure on Christians have

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<sup>106</sup> Ibid., 28-29.

<sup>107</sup> Ibid., 29.



contributed to church growth in China.’<sup>108</sup> In this statement, persecutions are described as a factor that happened during Cultural Revolution. For the present, big social changes and continued pressure on Christians are the factors that cause the hardship upon Christians in a Three-Self church like Haidian church.

### 6.3 Evaluation

It has been common that Christ is understood as the centre of Christian theology. In the Chinese context, Lin Xiangao, Wang Weifan and Sun Yi all in one way or another emphasise Christ as the head of the church and the focus of Christian devotion. In Wu’s case, he clearly holds Christ at the centre of his theology. Yet in emphasising Christ, Wu’s interest is describing the contrast between Jesus Christ and humans. In honouring Christ, Wu exposes how unchristian moral deterioration and social injustice are. However, Wu’s view is not of ‘Christ against culture’ as described by Richard Niebuhr. Instead, he understands the socio-political problems in China as temporal, and he portrays an ideal world which Christ intends to build on earth. When Wu believes Christ is the answer for humans’ problems, faith in Christ comes naturally as the solution to moral and socio-political problems, realising an ideal world. Wu’s view can be understood as counter-cultural in the sense that humans in their culture and society have gone far away from Christ. However, instead of presenting an incompatibility between Christ and culture and a doomed fate of the human world, Wu sees Christ as drawing humans and the world back to an ideal state on earth.

Wu’s description of Christ’s intended ideal world presents a view of post-millennialism, and he gives an impression that this world is to be realised in the near

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<sup>108</sup> Ibid., 143.

future. Considering that Wu is highly concerned about socio-political issues, promoting open engagement with society and proposing the realisation of an ideal world on earth, he appears to share something in common with Wu Yaozong. They both hold a view of post-millennialism, and they both urge the church to openly engage with society and politics. However, their differences are also evident. Wu Yaozong is commonly understood as a theological liberal who promotes social gospel. When comparing Christianity's religiosity and social contribution, he considers the latter to be the basis and purpose of Christianity.<sup>109</sup> In a time of nationwide economic crisis in the early 1930s, Wu Yaozong downplayed spiritual revival and charity works, promoting economic production and rural development as the primary concern of the church.<sup>110</sup> All these thoughts of Wu Yaozong are not found in Wu Weiqing. In Wu Weiqing's case, his concern for social injustice is driven by his understanding of God's attribute of justice and righteousness. It is true that Wu Weiqing places a heavy burden on socio-political problems and proposes the realisation of an ideal world on earth, but his theological reflection features an Evangelical perspective.

While Wu Weiqing proposes a faith-in-Christ solution, he also discusses how the church can be socially-engaged. However, his methods of social engagement do not seem effective or sufficient, and they seem to have weaknesses in two areas. The first area is extending Christians' practice of faith in the world, making the love of Christ and the Christian value known to people outside the church. Yet, Wu indicates

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<sup>109</sup> Wu Yaozong, 'Dui Wu Nian Yundong de Ganxiang Yu Xiwang' [Reflection and Expectation Towards the Five-Year Movement], *Zhenli yu Shengming* [Truth and Life] 4, no. 5: 17. Quoted in Wu Liming, *Jidujiao Yu Zhongguo*, 85.

<sup>110</sup> Wu Yaozong, 'Zhongguo de Jidujiao Wang Nali Qu?' [Where Is the Chinese Christianity Going?], in *Wu Yaozong Wenxuan* [Selected Writings of Y.T. Wu] (Shanghai: Lianghui, 2010), 32, 33.

that the Christian message encounters dislike and rejection from many people. Christians experience difficulty in practicing their faith outside the church, as they are facing an unbelieving generation of moral deterioration and socio-political corruption. Wu discusses that Christians and their children should have a harmonious relationship with other people. This harmonious relationship is one way through which society can improve, develop and become one of love and benevolence. But in reality, ‘society pressurises and makes Christians not able to do that.’<sup>111</sup> Wu here implies that due to social pressure, Christians may not be able to exercise their faith and value among non-Christians. In other words, Christians can try to evangelise non-Christians, but they may not be able to change or influence the latter if they remain unconverted. Wu’s sense of loneliness and view of the church as a refuge for Christians also further indicate the difficulty of Christians’ practice of faith outside the church.

The second area is involvement in social matters. In this area, Wu’s major concerns are social injustice and unfairness, and his methods of engagement is for the church to get involved in social services through charity work and pastoral support. These are more or less helpful to the poor and the underprivileged. However, in view of the fact that charity is one of the restricted social sectors in China,<sup>112</sup> it is unoptimistic how far Christians can go to impact the poor and the underprivileged with the Christian message and Christian values. Besides, these methods of Wu are not directed to the rich, the powerful and the privileged, who are usually responsible for social injustice or have the power to restore social justice.

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<sup>111</sup> Wu Weiqing, ‘Nanyi Jieshou de Shilian’ [Trials That Difficult to Bear], in *Haidian Jiaotang Zhuri Zhengdao Ji 2003* [*Haidian Church Collected Sunday Sermons 2003*], 37.

<sup>112</sup> Fulton, 76-77.

Whereas Wu expresses a sense of distance and criticism against these people, he nonetheless does not discuss how Christians may impact them with the Christian message or Christian values. When both two areas of social engagement are not proven effective, Wu's faith-in-Christ solution indicates that he prioritises evangelism over direct dealing with the socio-political context.

Wu's faith-in-Christ solution requires a precondition that the majority, if not all of the people in the world, or in China, become followers of Christ, and this precondition is only an assumption of Wu. It is noted that Scottish missionary and missiologist Alexander Duff understands 'the conversion of the world' as the Church's ulterior object and spiritual rights and privileges.<sup>113</sup> Having Duff as one of the examples in the 19<sup>th</sup> century, 'Scotland's missionaries displayed unwavering commitment to the belief that all their endeavours were towards the realization in history of the kingdom of Christ filling the whole earth.'<sup>114</sup> Duff's statement demonstrates Scottish missionaries' passion for Jesus' teaching on the Great Commission. However, while the Great Commission has been motivating the Church's global missions, spreading the Gospel 'to the ends of the earth' does not necessarily mean the conversion of vast majority, if not all, of the population in the globe. Meanwhile, both 'the kingdom of Christ' and its 'filling the whole earth' need further proper explanation. Given that Christians have never outnumbered or overwhelmingly influenced non-Christians in the globe, a view of 'conversion of the world' remains a theological assumption. Therefore, Wu's faith-in-Christ solution does not seem to match the goal of realising an ideal world. Nevertheless, his

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<sup>113</sup> Alexander Duff, *Missions the Chief End of the Christian Church* (Edinburgh: John Johnstone, third edition, 1839), 8.

<sup>114</sup> Iain H. Murray, *The Puritan Hope: A Study in Revival and the Interpretation of Prophecy* (London: The Banner of Truth Trust, 1971), 178.

emphasis of Christ and humans in sharp contrast with one another seems to be effective for evangelism in the Chinese society. In a society damaged by moral deterioration and social injustice, the ‘shocking truth’ of Christ seems appealing to people who have long been feeling empty in spirit. Wu’s appealing message helps to explain the large membership of Haidian church and its high growth rate since the early 1980s.<sup>115</sup> As the senior pastor of a big Three-Self church in Beijing, Wu states that comparing to many invisible house churches in Haidian district, Haidian church is ‘the only visible established Protestant church...in terms of its physical building and established pastoral personnel resources.’<sup>116</sup> Wu indicates that the visible establishment of Haidian church has been an advantage for the church to advance the Gospel among people of all walks of life in the area.

The large number and high growth rate of Haidian church indicate great spiritual needs of the people in local areas and Haidian church’s ability to meet the needs through restricted yet effective ministry. As indicated by Wu, Haidian church has also been social justice sensitive and involved in charity and social services, though in ways that do not violate any ‘red lines.’ Starting from 2008, the church has been open for visits from foreign politicians and Christian ministers. Considering all of these, although Wu does not envision the church as ‘a city sets on a hill,’ Haidian church with its physical building, scene of packed with attendees on Sundays, stable existence and social services can certainly be viewed as a Christian icon in the area.

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<sup>115</sup> Currently, Haidian church hosts six services on each Sunday, from 7 A.M. to 7 P.M., with over seven thousand attendees. The church consists of seventeen pastors and twelve full-time administrative staff, having about fifty branches and meeting points. Wu describes that since its reopening in the 1980s, about 400-500 people were baptised in Haidian church every year. Wu, ‘A Strategy,’ 41.

<sup>116</sup> Ibid., 13.

Wu's reciprocal view of church-state relationship, his skill of maintaining a friendly relationship with civil authorities and his compliance with government religious regulations have provided a necessary condition for Haidian church's stable existence and development over the years. Yet meanwhile, Wu's description of political hardship and criticism against civil authorities indicate church-state struggle in Haidian church. His statement of the Christian's citizenship of the kingdom of God as secondary to citizenship of the state may be understood as a compromise of faith under serious political pressure. This compromise may be criticised by some Christians as contradicting biblical teaching like 'obey God rather than men' (Acts 5:29). However, this compromise needs to be understood in line with Wu's consistent concern of staying out of the 'red lines' in order to keep the church running as it is.

Wu's concern for social justice and his method of engagement through social services comply with government's regulations and restrictions, therefore they do not present a challenge to current socio-political orders. Yet given that Wu is longing for an ideal world, which is highly contrasting to the current world of moral deterioration and social injustice, his faith-in-Christ solution is rather intended for changing people therefore changing the world. This solution seems to have a huge gap in reaching an ideal world of social justice and fairness based on Christian principles. Nevertheless, with a Christ-centred theology, Wu's message of Christ and humans in sharp contrast with one another has been an effective message drawing many people to the Christian faith.

#### 6.4 Conclusion

As a pastor and leader in the TSPM system, Wu explicitly expresses concern for moral deterioration and social injustice and strongly urges Christians to play their role in changing society. With a Christ-centred theology as his dominant theological thought, Wu proposes faith in Christ, that is, people's conversion to the Christian faith, as a solution to moral and social problems, therefore realising an ideal world of love and social justice. Wu's reasoning is that the socio-political problems will be solved when people are converted to Christ, and when the socio-political problems are solved, an ideal world will be realised. Wu prioritises evangelism over other methods of socio-political engagement, like charity work, social services and pastoral support. Considering evangelism as the primary means of changing the world, Wu seems willing to pay the price like comply with government restrictions in order to keep the church running, at least with basic ministry like evangelism and social services.

Wu's faith-in-Christ solution is understandable in light of his explanation of the contrast between Christ and humans, by which Wu exposes moral and social problems and explains Christ as the answer for the problems. Yet, this solution depends on the conversion of the masses to Christianity and it does not seem to match the goal of realising an ideal society in China. Wu may have presented an unrealistic goal of reaching an ideal society, but his evangelistic message has brought significant effect on church growth. Meanwhile, the large membership, fast growth rate, physical building and established leadership of Haidian church present an iconic existence and a positive image of Christianity in the Chinese society. As the contrast between Christ and humans has been an effective evangelistic message, which

increases the Christian population and somehow changes the landscape of the Chinese society, Wu's faith-in-Christ solution has been a significant approach of socio-political engagement.





## VII. EVOLUTIONARY TRENDS (1980S-2010S)

The previous chapters have explored and discussed the historical evolution of socio-political engagement of Chinese Protestant Christianity and four representative Evangelical figures' respective theologies. This chapter will discuss how theologies have generally evolved from the 1980s to the 2010s. The discussion will be carried on in three sections: evolution in house churches, evolution in Three-Self churches, and general evolution over the two periods. A number of other Protestant figures will be included in the discussion so as to help discover evolutions in general rather than random changes between the representative figures. Through the discussion, this chapter aims to find out what trends of theological evolution may have occurred across the four decades. After identifying the trends, their significance will be discussed in view of the historical evolution of theologies from the 1900s to the 2010s.

### 7.1 House Churches: From Private to Public

The case studies on Lin Xingao and Sun Yin reveal that Lin and Sun, though both are figures from house churches, hold rather different approaches towards the socio-political context. Generally speaking, whereas Lin's passion for a pious Christian life and a privatised faith corresponds with his socio-political disengagement, Sun's social concern and preference towards Neo-Calvinism encourage his public commitment and urge an open approach of social engagement. In short, while Lin is passionate about a privatised faith and socio-politically

disengaged, Sun is committed to the public and socio-politically engaged. Their different approaches reflect their respective contexts and theological preferences. In Lin's case, a conservative Evangelicalism and his experience of oppression in the dark decades of Christianity in China significantly shaped his overall theology. His socio-political approach remained consistent through his life. Although on a few occasions he commented on moral decline in the 2000s, his overall interest was keeping the church independent and maintaining a distinctive Christian life different from the life of the world. In the socialist context, whether in times of political lenience or times of oppression, Lin's pursuit of a pious Christian life and exhortation regarding eternal rewards implicitly indicate an indifferent attitude towards culture, society and politics.

While Lin was selected for case study, it should be noted that his privatised faith and disengagement with society and politics were shared by other Evangelical pastors like Li Tian-en, Yuan Xiangchen and Xie Moshan who were also prominent figures of the house church tradition. Li Tian-en (1928-2016), also due to his rejection towards the TSPM, was imprisoned for nearly eighteen years. He restarted ministry soon after his release in 1979, visiting and strengthening urban and rural churches in vast areas of China.<sup>1</sup> Unlike Lin, Li did not leave many writings. Yet Li's article on *Xinghua* (*Almond Followers*) provides a good glimpse of his

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<sup>1</sup> As Li was based in Henan province in his early years of ministry and later moved to Shanghai, some house church leaders honour Li as 'the root of the churches in Henan, and the light of the churches in Shanghai.' Hu Aiqian, 'Li Tian-en Anxi Libai Shanghai Juxing' [Li Tian-en's Memorial Service Held in Shanghai], Jidu Shibao [Christian Times], 16 May 2016, <https://www.christiantimes.cn/news/21022/李天恩安息礼上海举行-儿子李新民追思：父亲一生都跟随神的呼召>.

theological thought.<sup>2</sup> In the article, Li emphasises a cross-centre faith, by which he explains that the basic principle of the cross is life coming after death, and the Christian's experience of death in misery and suffering will bring forth a great resurrection of a new life.<sup>3</sup> Li understands that Christians experience brokenness through oppression and loss of social status. Yet in losing the fleshly, the old and the this-worldly, they will gain the eternal, the new and the everlasting. Li explains the Gospel revivals in China from the 1980s as due to the heaviness of the cross, on which the Christian's old self is deprived, destroyed and suppressed, but the new life then prospers.<sup>4</sup> Li highly values suffering and oppression in the Christian's life. Similar to Lin's view of sweetness coming after bitterness, Li understands that experience of death in suffering will bring forth a new life.

Like Lin Xiangao, Yuan Xiangchen (Allan Yuan, 1914-2005) was another figure significantly influenced by Wang Mingdao.<sup>5</sup> Due to his rejection of the TSPM, Yuan was imprisoned for twenty-one years. Soon after resuming ministry in the 1980s, his church became one of the largest house churches in Beijing in his era, with two to three hundred attendees. Yet Yuan insisted he would not join the TSPM,

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<sup>2</sup> Li had a good connection with Shouwang church. He had been a co-worker of Xie Moshan who ordained Jin Tianming as the pastor of Shouwang church. Li was also invited to preach at Shouwang church in 2009, and one of his articles was published in Shouwang church's journal *Xinghua*. Cf. Li Tian-en, 'Shizijia Gongzuo de Faze' [The Rule of the Cross], *Xinghua* [Almond Flowers] 9, no.3 (Autumn 2009): 4-16.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid., 4-5, 9.

<sup>4</sup> Ibid., 14.

<sup>5</sup> Yuan started attending Wang Mingdao's church service from 1930, and he was baptised by Wang in 1933. Yuan later worked as an evangelist in rural areas of Hebei and Shandong province from 1940 to 1945. In 1946, Yuan took over a church in Baitasi, Beijing, pioneered by a Japanese pastor, and then he developed it into an independent church. In the early 1950s, Yuan refused to join the TSPM. Then in 1958, He was arrested and charged as 'counter-revolutionary,' being imprisoned and was released in 1979. In 1989, Wang Mingdao said that Lin and Yuan were great comfort to him because they both endured oppression and stood firm in faith. Li Diya, *Huoji: Zhupu Yuan Xiangchen Zhuan* [Living Sacrifice: Biography of the Lord's Servant Allan Yuan] (Singapore: Every Home Crusade Co. Ltd., 1999), 79.

and his reasons were like those of Wang Mingdao.<sup>6</sup> Holding Christ as the head of the church, Yuan explains that they cannot accept any political group or the TSPM as the leadership of the church. He describes,

under this particular era of China, the only path of the church is house church, serving the Lord in the house. It will be a wrong path trying to have a sign or an organisation because those with signs and organisations will be ‘people’s organisations.’ Yet in China, ‘people’s organisations’ must be led by the CCP. When the church is led by the CCP, Christ is no longer her head.<sup>7</sup>

Yuan therefore holds a view of the separation between the church and the state. He explains that non-cooperation with the CCP’s SARA is non-involvement in politics rather than holding something against the CCP or the government. Yuan understands the church in the spiritual realm, while ‘people’s organisation’ (*renmin tuanti*) is in another. Yet, Yuan explains that Christians as citizens may participate in political activities, but they shall not do it as a church.<sup>8</sup> Considering Christians as citizens who may participate in politics, Yuan is not indifferent towards society or politics. Calida Chu argues that Yuan has an Anabaptist tendency of approaching theology. With this tendency, Yuan understands the church as a community that reveals and testifies the kingdom of God on earth.<sup>9</sup> This thought sounds different from the idea of Lin, who was rather indifferent towards the socialist cause and required his church members not to be involved in politics. Nevertheless, Yuan shares with Lin some major views, including church-state separation, independence of the church, rejection of TSPM and government’s intervention. Besides, they both

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<sup>6</sup> Yuan’s reasons include: (1) his church has already been independent from foreign control; (2) Christ as the head of the church and (3) dislike the theological modernism held by the leaders of the TSPM. Cf. Aikman, 59.

<sup>7</sup> Li, *Huo Ji*, 77.

<sup>8</sup> *Ibid.*, 40-41.

<sup>9</sup> Calida Chu, ‘Stanley Hauerwas’s Concept of God’s Kingdom: An Investigation of House Church Leader Allen Yuan’s Theology’ (MTH diss., University of Edinburgh, 2017), 37.

endured oppression, treasured their experience of suffering and personal faith and persevered on the path of house churches.

Xie Moshan (Moses Xie, 1918-2011) was another house church figure who endured imprisonment and labour camp for his faith from 1956 to 1979. From the early 1980s, instead of restarting church ministry, Xie focused on training younger generation pastors and leaders.<sup>10</sup> Xie left behind little writings of his own. Yet, he is described by Yuan Zhiming as a Christian intellectual in his generation.<sup>11</sup> Although being an intellectual, Xie clearly shared with the above-discussed figures an Evangelical stand. Xie was once Wu Yaozong's friend. But he severed relations with Wu when he saw no possibility of working with the latter, who, being a theological modernist, became the founder and leader of the TSPM. Similar with Lin, Xie insists that his faith is in Jesus and he does not have any political intent.<sup>12</sup> Keeping in view the separation between the church and the state, Xie realises the difference between the Christian and the world. Still he does not propose escapism. Instead, like Lin, Xie urges Christians to live out the Christian life on earth. Xie is mindful of the huge impact of society and the world, in which Christians still live. Yet, Christians in the world should overcome their self and live out the Christian life.<sup>13</sup> In view of this, Xie

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<sup>10</sup> As Xie was based in Beijing, Jin Tianming of Shouwang church is one of the many house church pastors being influenced, trained and ordained by him.

<sup>11</sup> Xie was a graduate from the well-known fundamentalist Huabei Theological Seminary. Before 1949, He worked as administrator, director and president in various Christian organisations. He also once worked as the editor of various Christian journals like *Budao Huikan* [Evangelistic Proceedings], *Shenggao* [Holy Anointing] and *Fuyin Jijin* [Gospel Highlights]. Li Yading, ed. 'Xie Moshan,' in *Huaren Jidujiao Shi Renwu Cidian* [Biographical Dictionary of Chinese Christianity], accessed 10 April 2019, <http://bdcconline.net/zh-hans/stories/xie-moshan>.

<sup>12</sup> Wang Xinchu, 'Huainian Xie Moshan Mushi Xie Bobo Fan Tianjia Yi Zhounian Ji' [In Remembrance of Pastor Xie Moshan in His First Year Anniversary], *Jidu Shibao* [Christian Times], 1 August 2012, <https://www.christiantimes.cn/news/6937/王欣出牧师：怀念谢模善牧师谢伯伯返天家一周年祭>.

<sup>13</sup> Xie Moshan, 'Huo Wei Zhu Huo, Si Wei Zhu Si' [To Live Is for the Lord; To Die Is for the Lord], Sermon at Zhongguo Fuyin Dahui 2003 [The Gospel for China Conference 2003], accessed 3 April 2019, <https://wellsofgrace.com/messages/misc/xiel.htm>.

shares with Lin an emphasis on the Christian life, which is different from the life of the world.

In the same generation of Lin Xiangao, Li, Yuan and Xie were all Evangelicals who rejected the TSPM and refused the CCP's religious intervention from the 1950s. Being anti-modernist and enduring oppression under the Communist regime for decades, they all chose to disengage with the wider society and politics. Meanwhile, their interest and emphases were the church and the Christian's pious life. Li Tian-en is recorded to say, 'although we studied theology before the Liberation, knowing a little bit about Hebrew and Greek, we have returned them all back to the teachers. My generation no longer has the opportunity. New works like Bible translation and theological formation are the business of the younger generation.'<sup>14</sup> Li here indicates that Evangelical Christians of his generation did not have the chance to develop their theology, especially in written and systematic form. The implication is that they did not have the chance because of their long experience of oppression and suffering in socialist China. Yet, undergoing oppression and suffering, they all turned their interest and focus on personal spiritual experience and the pious Christian life, from which they all had an emphasis on a privatised faith. Nevertheless, as explained in Lin's case, their disengagement with the socio-political context was itself a response to the context.

Li Tian-en, Yuan Xiangchen, Xie Moshan and Lin Xiangao emphasised a privatised faith and shared a similar socio-political approach of disengagement in

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<sup>14</sup> Zhu Jiaxing, 'Jinian Li Tian-en Qianbei Zhuanwen' [An Article in Memory of Predecessor Li Tian-en], accessed 29 March 2019, [https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?\\_\\_biz=MzA3MjYzNzgxNQ==&mid=2651062680&idx=1&sn=0b2baaed60f0cde5ff478cfd481183c0&scene=1&srcid=0515ExyImx5B7bR9hXovT84H&from=groupmessage&isappinstalled=0#wechat\\_redirect](https://mp.weixin.qq.com/s?__biz=MzA3MjYzNzgxNQ==&mid=2651062680&idx=1&sn=0b2baaed60f0cde5ff478cfd481183c0&scene=1&srcid=0515ExyImx5B7bR9hXovT84H&from=groupmessage&isappinstalled=0#wechat_redirect).

their generation. Compared to them, Sun Yi belongs to a younger generation of Christians who came to Christianity and church life in the 1990s. Yet with Jin Tianming being ordained by Xie Moshan and Shouwang church's ministry connection with Li Tian-en, people like Jin and Sun inherit much of the house church tradition. They also keep an Evangelical stand and refuse to register Shouwang church with the TSPM. Nevertheless, Sun proposes a different approach of socio-political engagement. House churches have also been called underground churches, which means literally going underground in times of severe oppression. Yet from the mid-1990s, the Chinese context features relatively lenient religious policy, serious moral and social problems and significant growth and development of urban house churches and Christian intellectuals. Representing a new generation, Sun realises that the church should openly engage with the wider society, bringing influence and change in the world. Sun proposes dialogue with civil authorities as a means of pushing the church into the public. Being influenced by Neo-Calvinism, Sun develops his understanding of the church's openness and integrity and explains a vision of 'a city set on a hill.'

Sun Yi's approach of open engagement has been widely known, taking into account Shouwang church's case of high-profile struggle with the local government. Nonetheless, Sun's open approach, broadly speaking, has been shared by some of his house church contemporaries like Yu Jie, Wang Yi and Jin Mingri. Yu Jie (born 1973) started his career as an independent writer and dissident.<sup>15</sup> He became a

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<sup>15</sup> In 1998, Yu Jie published his first book *Ice and Fire (Bing yu Huo)*, in which he sharply criticised the culture and politics in contemporary China. Yu subsequently published a number of books concerning culture and politics, receiving several awards for his writings. From 2000, it became difficult to publish his writings inside China due to government intervention. Yu then published his writings in Hong Kong, Taiwan and the U.S.



Christian in 2003, two years after his wife's conversion and the start of the Bible study fellowship at their home. The fellowship grew in number and soon became a church called the Ark Church (*fangzhou jiaohui*), which attracted a number of writers, scholars, lawyers, journalists and artists who were active in human rights defence. Yu kept his role as an active dissident after his conversion, and the Ark Church reflected his role as a Christian as well as a dissident.<sup>16</sup> Meanwhile, Yu was associated with dissidents like Liu Xiaobo, publicly appealing to the government concerning politics and human right issues.<sup>17</sup> Yu has been politically high-profile also through events like meeting with the U.S. president George W. Bush at the White House in May 2006, together with two other Chinese Christian activists Wang Yi and Li Boguang, to discuss issues like freedom of religious belief in China. Holding a dual role as Christian and dissident, Yu faced harassment from the government from time to time. In 2012, Yu and his family went into exile in the U.S. In 2018, Yu obtained citizenship in the U.S., and he and his wife continue church ministry in Chantilly, Virginia.

Generally speaking, Yu is a faithful advocator of Reformed theology. He considers the Puritan tradition, Reformed theology and Protestant ethics as the essence of Christianity in the modern era. With this essence, Christianity is to bring forth first personal conversion, and then, repentance of the whole nation.

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<sup>16</sup> The Ark Church is open to accept political dissidents, the oppressed by the government, released prisoners, the wrongly treated by social injustice, the unemployed, the ill, the disable and the discarded women. Yu's wife describes the church as focusing on evangelism, especially towards urban intellectuals, while fulfilling its mission of the cultural mandate (*wenhua shiming*) and social concern. Ning Xuan, 'Zhenguang Zhaoliang le Women' [The True Light Has Enlightened Us], Quianqiu Jianzheng [Global Witness], 26 February 2013, <http://j.fengshengrens.com/portal.php?mod=view&aid=4504>.

<sup>17</sup> Yu Jie Joined Liu Xiaobo in signing the '08 Xianzhang' [Charter 08]. For a full version of the '08 Xianzhang,' see Liu Xiaobo and others, '08 Xianzhang' [Charter 08], Radio Free Asia, 13 July 2016, <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/pinglun/liuxiaobopinglunzhuanji/lxb-07132017104422.html>.

Accordingly, Yu considers freedom of religious belief as the primary right because the Christian faith comes first, reconstruction of value system comes second then last comes transformation of society.<sup>18</sup> With regard to advocates of Reformed tradition in China, Yu is aware of the fact that in China the charismatic out-number the Presbyterian Christians. Yu, though, insists it is the Presbyterian Christians, with Reformed theology, who provide a holistic worldview and participate in the transformation of the Chinese society. Yu calls these Christians ‘a significant few,’ who should promote their theological structure, helping to correct long-lasting fundamentalism, pietism, charismaticism, anti-intellectualism and folk Christianity.<sup>19</sup> As an urban Christian intellectual, Yu believes that the rising urban churches will become an important force contributing to China’s change towards a civil society. The contribution will include three areas. Firstly, urban churches can correct the privatisation of faith and develop public theology and political theology. Secondly, in an authoritarian society, urban Christians can start learning a lifestyle of democracy in the church. Thirdly, urban church should be actively involved in public affairs like charity, education and culture and helping to expand the public space in China.<sup>20</sup>

As an activist, Yu claims that Christians are supposed to stand against the government, which practices evil, causes injustice and forces its people to practice evil. He criticises that the Chinese churches and Christians have been weak in this

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<sup>18</sup> Yu Jie, ‘Zhongguo de Xinyang Fuxing, Shehui Chongjian Yu Zhidu Zhuanxing’ [China’s Faith Revival, Social Reconstruction and System Transformation], BackChina, 22 July 2010, <https://www.backchina.com/forum/20100722/info-855029-1-1.html>.

<sup>19</sup> Yu Jie, ‘Zhanglao Jiaohui, Minzhu Zhuanxing yu Gonghe Jingshen’ [Presbyterian Church, Democratic Transformation and Republican Spirit], Independent Chinese Pen Centre, 3 October 2014, <https://www.chinesepen.org/blog/archives/10238>.

<sup>20</sup> Yu Jie, ‘Zhongguo Jidujiao de Weilai’ [The Future of Christianity in China], First Things, accessed 13 April 2019, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2016/08/中国基督教的未来>.

matter. They try to avoid politics and dare not point out evil.<sup>21</sup> Yu laments that after the CCP came into power in 1949 and soon started to persecute the church, most Christians and churches could not withstand a single blow and yielded to the CCP. Yu agrees with Jonathan Chao, who comments that the churches ‘failed in the 1950s’ due to their lack of theological education in areas like political theology and relevant spiritual formation. Therefore, Yu appeals that the Chinese church should intentionally take up the cultural mandate, moving Christian culture from the margin to the centre. Since the Christian faith is active and holistic, Christians should not be utterly ignorant about politics, law, economy, culture and education in the secular world. Instead, Christian intellectuals should take up the mission of making the Christian faith enlightening to the whole of China.<sup>22</sup>

Wang Yi (born 1973) is another figure briefly mentioned earlier in the present thesis. As a law scholar specialising in political liberalism and constitutionalism, Wang is a well-known public intellectual, being listed by the *Southern People Weekly (Nanfang Renwu Zhoukan)* in 2004 as one of the fifty influential public intellectuals in China. Yet, Wang was converted to Christianity in 2005 and became the senior pastor of the Early Rain Covenant Church in 2011. As a law scholar, Wang understands that while the Constitution may set the boundary of interrelationship between individuals, it cannot create a way of social life. Wang looks to the church as a Christian community, which has the responsibility and the ability to demonstrate a way of community life that has not been seen in China.

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<sup>21</sup> Yu Jie, ‘Shi Gongyi Ru Jianghe Taotao’ [Righteousness Like A Mighty Stream], Boxun, accessed 13 April 2019, [https://blog.boxun.com/hero/200805/yujie/1\\_1.shtml](https://blog.boxun.com/hero/200805/yujie/1_1.shtml).

<sup>22</sup> Yu Jie, ‘Yingjie Zhongguo Fuyin Chuanbo de Di Er Ge Huangjin Shidai’ [Welcoming the Second Golden Age of Spreading the Gospel in China], China Ministries International, accessed 12 April 2019, <http://cmiusca.org/page/ying-jie-zhong-guo-fu-yin>.

Wang states that the style of rich community life in the church is the most lacking in the Chinese society and Chinese culture. In view of this, Wang considers construction of local churches as having an irreplaceable value for the transformation of the Chinese society. However, Wang views this transformation not as the purpose but a by-product of the church, and this by-product will eventually prepare people's heart for a greater Gospel movement.<sup>23</sup>

Wang's discussion on the church community as a great model of social life demonstrates his ability as a lawyer, writer and thinker. Yet, his open approach of socio-political engagement seems to be enhanced by his brave character.<sup>24</sup> In his preaching, Wang states, 'I only care whether God likes it or not, and not care whether the government likes it or not. I will do whatever God likes, and not to do whatever God does not like. Since when politics sets a standard for the church?'<sup>25</sup> In Wang's Sunday sermon on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2018, he states, 'we have the responsibility to tell Xi Jinping that he is a sinner. The government led by him seriously sins against God because he persecutes the church of Christ. If he does not repent, he will perish. We want to inform him that a man who is evil like him still has a way out, which is through the cross of Christ.'<sup>26</sup> Wang's high-profile activities and his condemnation of the ruler are not tolerated by the government. On 9<sup>th</sup> December

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<sup>23</sup> Yu Jie, 'Jidutu Shequ Shi Zhege Shijie de Xiwang-Chengdu Qiuyuzhifu Guizheng Jiaohui Wang Yi Zhanglao Fangtan' [Christian Community Is the Hope of This World-Interview with Wang Yi the Elder of Chengdu Early Rain Reformed Church], Independent Chinese Pen Centre, 22 December 2018, <https://www.chinesepen.org/blog/archives/118737>.

<sup>24</sup> Wang is described as someone who overcomes fear. Cf. Cai Yongmei, 'Wang Yi Mushi: Yige Yonggan Wuwei de Ren' [Pastor Wang Yi: One Who Is Brave and Fearless], Open, last modified 15 December 2018, <http://www.open.com.hk/content.php?id=3685#.XLD-wS2ZPow>.

<sup>25</sup> Xiao-an, 'Bei Daya de Chengdu Qiuyu Jiaohui Wang Yi Mushi Shengming' [Profession of Wang Yi, Pastor of the Oppressed Chengdu Early Rain Church], Radio Free Asia, 3 January 2019, <https://www.rfa.org/mandarin/zhuantan/wangluoboyi/iwar-01032019095251.html>.

<sup>26</sup> Wang Yi, 'Yiqi Denghou Deshu de Rizhi' [Waiting Together for the Day of Redemption], Sunday service sermon, Early Rain Covenant Church in Chengdu, 9 September 2018. Facebook, 17 February 2019, <https://www.facebook.com/earlyraincovenantchurch/videos/390807304829796/>.

2018, Early Rain Covenant Church was raided by local government, over one hundred members were detained, and Wang Yi and his wife Jiang Rong were arrested on the charge of ‘inciting subversion of state power.’

Forty-eight hours after the raid, the church released on Internet websites Wang’s pre-prepared article, ‘My Profession: Religious Disobedience.’ In this article, Wang severely criticises the CCP regime,

as a pastor, based on the Bible, I have my view concerning just order and good governance in the fields of society, politics and law. At the same time, I really disgust and hate the evil of the CCP regime’s oppression upon the church and deprivation of humanity’s freedom of religious belief and conscience...The CCP regime’s oppression upon the church is a crime of extremely evil. As a pastor, I must seriously and publicly rebuke such evil. My calling requires me, through non-violence means and with peace and endurance, to disobey human law that disobeys God and the Bible.<sup>27</sup>

While heavily criticising the regime, Wang professes that he does not have intention to change any law or political systems in China because any such changes are not the mission of his calling, nor the purpose of the Gospel. Instead, Wang’s ‘only concern is how religious disobedience may bring shock upon human sinful nature and witness to the cross of Christ.’<sup>28</sup> Wang explains further that ‘all the purpose of the church and its ministry in China is to witness for Christ in the world and witness for the kingdom of heaven in China.’<sup>29</sup> Wang understands the purpose of his religious disobedience as not to change this world, but to witness to another world. He also insists that his religious disobedience is part of his gospel mission. He explains that ‘in a modern autocratic country which persecute the church and oppose the gospel, religious

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<sup>27</sup> Wang Yi, ‘Wode Shengming: Xinyangshang de Kangming’ [My Profession: Religious Disobedience], Shidai Luntan [Christian Times], accessed 3 April 2019, [https://christiantimes.org.hk/Common/Reader/News/ShowNews.jsp?Nid=156491&Pid=104&Version=0&Cid=2053&Charset=big5\\_hkscs](https://christiantimes.org.hk/Common/Reader/News/ShowNews.jsp?Nid=156491&Pid=104&Version=0&Cid=2053&Charset=big5_hkscs).

<sup>28</sup> Ibid.

<sup>29</sup> Ibid.

disobedience is a necessary part of the gospel movement.’<sup>30</sup> The profession of Wang’s religious disobedience sounds astonishing in the sense that it is perhaps the first time in China that a Christian pastor heavily and publicly criticised, even condemned the CCP regime in a thorough manner. It demonstrates a Christian’s courage in condemning evil and firmness in professing faith.

Wang’s profession indicates that he has adjusted his expectation towards socio-political change. In his earlier writings, Wang indicated a strong interest in constitutionalism, political liberalism and Christianity especially Puritan tradition’s role in political change towards democracy and rule of law.<sup>31</sup> Yet in this profession, Wang does not intend to change, or expect to see any change taking place, at least under the current political leadership. Meanwhile, he describes his ‘only concern’ as the church’s witness to the cross of Christ and to another world. Yet, Wang’s adjustment is not surprising since he once stated that socio-political change is only a by-product of the church’s witness for Christ in the world. In addition, considering that this profession was pre-prepared by Wang before his arrest in December, the official ban of Zion Church (Beijing) by local government in September of the same year might have sent Wang a signal of danger. The danger makes sense, even sounds expected, because while Zion Church is an open and prominent house church with over one thousand members in the north of China, Wang’s Early Rain Covenant Church is just another open and prominent one in the south. When imprisonment seemed imminent and Wang was willing to pay this price, he would take this chance to emphasise what he truly valued in faith, and discard what was temporal to him.

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<sup>30</sup> Ibid.

<sup>31</sup> Cf. Wang Yi, ‘The Possibility of Political Theology: Christianity and Liberalism,’ *Chinese Law and Religion Monitor* 8, no. 1 (January-June 2012): 96-118. See also Alexander Chow’s discussion on Wang Yi’s political concern in theology. Chow, ‘Calvinist Public Theology,’ 166-67.

However, having no intention or expectation towards socio-political change does not mean that Wang disengages from society or politics. To the contrary, as Wang says that he ‘must seriously and publicly rebuke such evil,’ his approach remains one of open engagement with society and politics.

Jin Mingri (also known as Ezra Jin), founder and senior pastor of Zion Church in Beijing, is another house church figure who promotes the church’s open engagement with society. Jin was a Three-Self church pastor who had a ten-year experience in the TSPM system, including studies in the Yanjing Theological Seminary (YTS) and pastoring in the Gangwashi church in Beijing.<sup>32</sup> Jin was converted to Christianity at the time of the Tiananmen square event in 1989. With great disappointment towards the regime, he turned his interest to the Christian faith and felt the hope and love in a Three-Self church in Beijing. Nevertheless, after finishing his DMin degree at the Fuller Theological Seminary, Jin returned to China and pioneered a house church - Zion Church in 2007. In 2010, Jin describes the TSPM as like a state-owned organisation in the religious field, which lacks subject consciousness, vitality and creativity. It cannot timely and appropriately respond to the spiritual needs of the present age, therefore, doomed to decline. Jin comments that the theological reconstruction started in 1998 was just a movement of upgrading liberal theology to the level of politics and driving away those who advocated tolerance and unity.<sup>33</sup>

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<sup>32</sup> Jin is a Korean ethnic minority in China. He graduated from Beijing University in 1990. Jin first attended a Three-Self church in Beijing in 1987. He was later recommended by a faculty member of YTS and then enrolled in the seminary in 1992. In 1994, Jin started church ministry at a Three-Self church, Gangwashi church in Beijing until 2002.

<sup>33</sup> Yu Jie and Wang Yi, ‘Zhongguo Chengshi Jiaohui de Xingqi yu Qianzhan-Beijing Xi-an Jiaohui Zhuren Mushi Jin Mingri Fangtan’ [The Rise and Prospect of Urban Churches in China-Interview with Ezra Jin Senior Pastor of Zion Church in Beijing], in *Yisheng Yishi de Yangwang* [*The Expectation for Whole Life*] (Taipei: Christian Arts Press, 2010), 61.

With regard to the church's role in the public space, Jin explains that Zion Church is one of the churches which propose an open approach towards social engagement, bearing in mind the cultural mandate (*wenhua shiming*) of the church. In an interview conducted by Yu Jie, Jin points out civil authorities' failure to solve many social issues. Yet, the church has taken over to solve these issues through effective works like family counselling, social care and charity. Jin concludes that the church is therefore the basis of social stability.<sup>34</sup> Meanwhile, Jin comments that there are two negative traditions in the Chinese church: (1) theological conservatism causes political naivety; some of the fundamental thoughts urge Christians to live a lifestyle of a hermit; (2) internalisation of faith and parochialisation of truth cause the church to lose its influence on society. Jin therefore holds an open view towards politics. He insists that Christianity should not avoid politics because the church's activities have a political dimension. Jin explains that when Christianity proclaims Jesus Christ as the Messiah, this is already an expression of a political view.<sup>35</sup> Unlike Yu Jie and Wang Yi, Jin states that Zion Church does not have a definite denominational belonging. He explains that the church has a Reformed background and the majority of its Bible school teachers are inclined to the Reformed tradition. But Jin and his church are vigilantly on guard against absolutising the Reformed tradition.<sup>36</sup> Jin states that the churches in China should not simply copy theology from the West. Chinese Christians are living in their own land, understanding how the biblical truth may be applied in China. The Chinese church should thoroughly establish its own theology, bearing in mind their sense of time and history.<sup>37</sup>

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<sup>34</sup> Ibid., 72.

<sup>35</sup> Ibid., 69.

<sup>36</sup> Ibid., 60.

<sup>37</sup> Ibid., 74.



Therefore, holding the same open approach towards the socio-political context, Jin proposes to have the Chinese's own theology, instead of copying or taking Reformed theology as the essential guideline for socio-political engagement.

The previous survey shows that Yu Jie, Wang Yi, Jin Mingri and Sun Yi all propose an approach of open engagement with the socio-political context. However, there are some differences among them. Fredrik Fällman describes that there are two 'factions' within Chinese Christian intellectuals who advocate Calvinism. Yu Jie is the foremost representative of one faction, which stresses the connection between Calvinism and democracy, and the political implications of faith. Sun Yi, as well as Jin Tianming, are representatives of another faction, which has Puritan faith in focus, including social involvement but not directly political.<sup>38</sup> This observation of Fällman fairly describes the case. Yu Jie majored in Chinese literature. He is a thinker, writer, public intellectual and dissident, yet without being specialised in theology, religious studies or any particular social science. Based on this background, Yu has various important and inspiring ideas. However, it seems that Yu is preoccupied by his ideas, but he fails to understand them in a particular context. For instance, Yu realises and intensely discusses the importance of democracy and the political implications of faith, but he cannot understand why Chinese Christians have not contributed much in these areas. He argues that for a long time Chinese Christians have failed to produce prominent theologians and great artists who would be globally renown.<sup>39</sup> He also laments on the lack of qualities like Puritan life, conservative political outlook and Reformed faith among Chinese public intellectuals, and he considers himself and a

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<sup>38</sup> Fredrik Fällman, 'Calvin, Culture and Christ? Developments of Faith Among Chinese Intellectuals' in *Christianity in Contemporary China: Socio-cultural Perspectives*, ed. Francis Khek Gee Lim (London, New York: Routledge, 2013), 162.

<sup>39</sup> Ibid., 154.

handful of others sharing his views as ‘the very spearhead of development.’<sup>40</sup> In Yu’s thinking, he focuses on the ideals of Reformed theology, but he does not properly understand or address the historical, socio-political, cultural and ecclesiastical contexts in China, especially the contexts after 1949. Yu’s knowledge and educational background may contribute to his interest in ideas and neglect of context. Besides, it may also be because he is now living in exile and writing from outside of the Chinese context, therefore, without a risk of imprisonment and an ability to dialogue with the government.

Concerning the second faction, although Sun Yi highly values and insists on the vision of ‘a city set on a hill’ through years of difficult situations, he, as well as Wang Yi, considers any social impact of the church as a by-product. Like Sun who considers knowing Jesus Christ as the most precious, Wang has a strong sense of end times and a view of life on earth as a sojourner.<sup>41</sup> In view of these similar ideas between Sun and Wang, Wang can be viewed as in the second faction rather than in that of Yu Jie. Although Wang is a law scholar specialising in political liberalism and constitutionalism, he highly values and intensely discusses the construction of local churches. While Yu Jie has his focus on democracy and the political aspects of Reformed theology, Wang seems to have more influence on local Christians in China, and his ‘religious disobedience’ comes with the price of imprisonment. When imprisonment was the case for Wang, Yu acquired the U.S. citizenship in the same year. In the Chinese context where suffering for faith has been highly honoured, Wang’s case certainly has made much greater impact than Yu’s.

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<sup>40</sup> Ibid., 160.

<sup>41</sup> Yu, ‘Jidutu Shequ.’

Jin Mingri is different from the other three figures in the sense that although he may find Reformed theology or Calvinism helpful, he does not consider it essential in the church's open approach of socio-political engagement. Jin is ministry and mission focused as he explains that Zion Church has three visions: proclaiming the words of God, building up Christianised families and spreading the gospel to the West (Jerusalem).<sup>42</sup> Jin's particular interest in a Christianised family may be due to his background as a Korean ethnic, and he may have some experience with the churches in South Korea. Besides, Jin's experience in the TSPM system may expose him to an ecclesiastical context, which may lead him to be open and practical towards society and politics. After establishing Zion Church, Jin was able to maintain a proper relationship with local authorities until the church was officially banned in 2018 when the state became increasingly aggressive towards Christianity and religion. Nevertheless, Jin's case helps to explain that an open approach of socio-political engagement has been a vision shared by many prominent urban house church leaders, despite their different personal, ecclesiastical and theological backgrounds.

## 7.2 Three-Self Churches: From Culture to Society

As figures working within the TSPM system, both Wang Weifan and Wu Weiqing express their interest and approach of active engagement with the wider society. However, it is equally remarkable that they present rather different approaches. Generally speaking, Wang draws his motivation from traditional

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<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 71. Jin's DMin dissertation is entitled 'Back to Jerusalem with All Nations,' which has been published in 2016. Jin Mingri, *Back to Jerusalem with All Nations: A Biblical Foundation* (Begnum Studies in Mission, 2016).

Chinese culture, while Wu derives a burden from the masses' interest in society. In his dominant theological concerns on a unified Chinese church, Chinese culture's role on Chinese theology and the church's relationship with the state and the society, Wang touches various topics, including the TSPM, the church's adaptation to socialism, the church's ethical function and prophetic role, the advantages of Chinese culture and its role in Chinese theology. However, while Wang's arguments on socio-political topics are often made from a socialist perspective and lacking effectiveness, Chinese culture plays an underlying role in all of his dominant theological concerns. His socio-political engagement is therefore significantly driven and shaped by Chinese culture.

While Wang Weifan, as an Evangelical, was selected for case study, it is necessary that some Evangelical figures like Jia Yuming, Yang Shaotang and Chen Chonggui are included in the discussion. Since these figures were Evangelicals who joined the TSPM, an inclusion of them will help the discussion of the evolution of the socio-political approaches in Three-Self churches. Among the three figures, Jia Yuming (1880-1964) was a well-known and highly regarded Evangelical pastor, theologian and theological educator.<sup>43</sup> Jia joined the TSPM on the concern that his seminary and publication would be permitted to continue.<sup>44</sup> Besides, with an influence of Confucianism in his theology, Jia might join the TSPM on a concern of

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<sup>43</sup> Jia's Evangelical stand was clearly revealed in 1936 when he resigned from his post as the president of Jinling Women's Theological Seminary, which would be combined with Jinling Theological Seminary and receiving funds donated by American theological liberals. Jia then moved to establish the China Christian Spiritual College (*Zhongguo Jidujiao Lingxiu Xueyuan*), which valued both academic studies and spirituality.

<sup>44</sup> 'Jia Yuming Mushi de Cantong Jiaoxun,' China Aid.

Xin-en comments that Jia Yuming did not give a clear consideration of political theology and intentionally or not, he took church-state relationship outside of his theological thinking. Xin-en, 'Rao Bukai de Jueze: Dangdai Jia Yuming Gu Yuese Mushi Beiqiu de Lishi Huixuan' [An Unavoidable Choice: Today's 'Jia Yuming' Pastor Gu Yuese's Arrest as A Historical Swing], Facebook, 3 March 2016, <https://www.facebook.com/1673616869577871/posts/1683116415294583/>.

Confucian teaching on concept like great harmony (*da tong*). In 1954, Jia Yuming, Yang Shaotang and Chen Chonggui, all being Evangelicals who had joined the TSPM, were elected as three of the six vice chairpersons of the TSPM. However, the promise to Jia was never kept. He was suppressed and identified as a rightist in 1957 and could hardly be heard in the Christian circle from then on.

Jia is well-known for his spiritual life theology (*lingming shenxue*), by which he emphasises the Christian's spiritual life and develops the concept of Christ-human (*Jidu ren*).<sup>45</sup> By Christ-human, Jia refers to the status of a more abundant life, in which 'the human flesh comes to the Word' (*roushen cheng dao*), and the human spirit is in union with the Holy Spirit. Wang Delong comments that Jia's spiritual life theology is based on loyalty to the Bible and the Christian faith while moving from speculative doctrinal theology to experiential Chinese dispositional metaphysics. Likewise, Jia's concept of Christ-human borrows the Chinese concept of heaven and humanity in unity. It is one among many of Jia's efforts of indigenisation while keeping Evangelical doctrine. Therefore, Jia's theology should be viewed as China's Christianisation rather than Christianity's sinicisation.<sup>46</sup>

Yang Shaotang (David Yang, 1900-1969) was born in a Christian family and received Christian education from his early school years. He later worked closely with missionaries of the CIM in his early years of ministry, promoting churches to be built based on the three-self principles. In 1939, Yang moved to Beijing and had a close relationship with Wang Mingdao and Song Shangjie. In 1946, Yang left for

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<sup>45</sup> For a study on Jia Yuming's spiritual life theology, cf. Xie Longyi, *Jidu Ren: Jia Yuming de Lingming Shenxue* [Christ-Human: The Spiritual Life Theology of Jia Yuming] (Taipei: China Evangelical Seminary Press, 2008).

<sup>46</sup> Wang Delong, 'Lun Jia Yuming de Lingming Shenxue' [On Jia Yuming's Spiritual Life Theology] *Jingling Shenxue Zhi* [Nanjing Theological Review], no. 1-2 (2017): 144-45, 147, 152.

Nanjing to teach at the Taidong Theological Seminary, and he soon established an Evangelical church in Huang Ni Gang, Nanjing. In the early 1950s, Yang joined the TSPM and was elected as one of the vice chairpersons of the TSPM. However, Yang was oppressed during the denunciation campaign in 1952. He was later charged as a rightist in 1957 and ‘anti-revolutionary’ after the Cultural Revolution started.

As an Evangelical, Yang, together with Wang Mingdao and Watchman Nee, are described by Leslie Lyall as three of China’s mighty men among the Chinese Protestants.<sup>47</sup> But unlike Wang who refused the TSPM and attacked modernists, or Nee who was ambiguous in his relationship with the TSPM, Yang definitely decided to join the TSPM. In an article, Yang’s son gives three reasons of Yang’s joining the TSPM: (1) the CCP had made a good impression through its highly disciplined army and uncorrupted cadres, which contrast to the Nationalist Party’s corruption; (2) Yang had been patriotic during the Sino-Japanese war; (3) the Communist government required only people’s patriotism and promised freedom of religious belief.<sup>48</sup> However, in an online article, an unnamed author argues that Yang joined the TSPM not because he was patriotic or he could not discern the socio-political situation. Instead, before joining the TSPM, Yang had experienced the denunciation campaign, knowing modernist figures like Wu Yaozong and hearing about Wang Mingdao’s writing regarding modernists as a ‘party of the unbelievers.’ Therefore, it

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<sup>47</sup> Lyall describes Yang as ‘man of humility’, Nee as ‘man of insight’, and Wang as ‘man of iron.’ Lyall, *Three of China’s Mighty Men*.

<sup>48</sup> Yang Dixiong, ‘Si Zai Yesu Qian, Huo Zai Yesu Qian-Huiyi Wo de Fuqin Yang Shaotang Mushi’ [Die Before Jesus, Live Before Jesus-In Memory of My Father Pastor Yang Shaotang], WellsOfGrace, accessed 16 April 2019, <http://www.wellsOfGrace.com/resources/biography/yang.htm>.

was simply because under great pressure, Yang compromised and joined the TSPM in order to survive.<sup>49</sup>

Chen Chonggui (Marcus Cheng, 1884-1964) received his education at missionary-founded schools from his early age. From 1909, Chen's ministry involved teaching theology, pastoring and itinerant evangelising in vast areas of China. In 1943, in cooperation with and support from the CIM, Chen founded the Chongqing Theological Seminary. In 1954, Chen was elected as one of the six vice chairpersons of the TSPM. From 1949 to 1957, in his speech and writings, Chen advocated the CCP, the Communist regime and the TSPM.<sup>50</sup> Compared to Jia Yuming and Yang Shaotang, Chen indicated more support for the CCP and the Communist regime as he, through extensive writings on *Tian Feng* in the summer of 1950, 'was highly critical of the missionary record in China, and praised fulsomely the new regime and its policies.'<sup>51</sup> Chen's attitude was due to his years of humiliating experiences as 'a second-class junior associate' with foreign missions.<sup>52</sup> However, he was condemned as a rightist in 1957 after he made a speech of criticism against a cadre's speech against Christianity. After that, he gradually became silent and was no longer permitted to express his view in public space.

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<sup>49</sup> 'Dui Yang Shaotang Mushu de Butong Kanfa.' Bian Yunbo describes that in 1954, after attending meetings of the TSPM, Yang visited Wang Mingdao in Beijing. Wang respectfully received Yang. It is believed that Wang must try to admonish Yang not to join the TSPM, but it seemed that Yang did not change his mind. Bian, 'Shen Suo Shiyong de Ren zhi Yang Shaotang.'

<sup>50</sup> In one of his articles, originally published in *Tian Feng (Heavenly Wind)*, on 19 January 1952, Chen stated, 'Now I realize that it is only Marxism-Leninism that is the science of revolution and the weapon for the liberation of the people...I have seen the glorious accomplishments of the Chinese Communist Party in the service of the Chinese people. I have gone through a long process of mental struggle, which made me think through anew the meaning of Christian scriptures and Christian doctrine. It is because of all this, and only because of it, that I can truthfully say that I love the Communist Party, and that I accept the thought of Communism and of Mao Tze-tung as the science of society.' Chen Chonggui, 'How My Political Thinking Has Changed,' in *Documents of the Three-Self Movement*, 58.

<sup>51</sup> Bays, *A New History*, 167.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid., 138-40, 166.

Among the three figures discussed above, Chen was more active and supportive towards the Communist regime. Yet, Chen's active engagement, particularly praise of the Communist regime, was mostly due to his difficult experience with foreign missions and the CCP's policy of cutting off relationship with foreign powers and Christianity. When conflict was later pushed by the CCP's cadre, Chen made a wrong judgment and was oppressed. When freedom of religious belief was not kept as promised and the CCP became increasingly aggressive towards the Evangelicals in the TSPM, Jia, Yang and Chen found out that they were in the wrong camp with the modernists, whom they were not meant to work with. With various movements carried out by the CCP, the three became silent in the public space. Their initial participation in the TSPM seemed to indicate a welcome gesture towards the socio-political context, but they did so with complicated reasons and concerns rather than based on their theological perspectives. Even so, their seemingly welcome gesture, or an engaging attitude, ended in silence. Unlike Wang Weifan who had Chinese culture as a strong impetus for his socio-political engagement, Jia, Yang and Chen did not have something of that kind that would motivate them to work with the modernist or cooperate with the CCP. Jia, Yang and Chen all died prior to the reopening of China. With the exception of Wang Weifan, there were not really that many prominent Evangelicals in the TSPM in the early 1980s.

Among the Evangelicals who joined the TSPM from the 1950s, Wang Weifan was the only figure that managed to keep engaging with the socio-political context, though his engagement was significantly driven by Chinese cultural teaching. From the 1990s when the younger generation rose up, Wu Weiqing started



to demonstrate an interest and priority highly different from that of Wang Weifan. Compared to Wang who is culture-oriented but socio-politically engaged, Wu is only society-oriented. Wu does not show interest in revitalising traditional Chinese culture or discussing the state's official policy. With regard to 'harmonious society,' he does not bother to discuss harmony as a fundamental Confucian concept. Nor does he discuss how the term has been officially presented by the state. Instead, Wu focuses his interest on social issues closely related to ordinary people. Regarding serious social problems, Wu employs Christian teachings and refers to faith in Christ as the solution to problems. He expresses a perspective of the masses and discusses their interest. He is burdened with problems of moral deterioration and social injustice.

Wang Weifan might have been lonely as there were no Evangelical figures who managed to walk along with him in the modernist-led TSPM. In the case of Wu Weiqing, he may find it much easier to have Evangelical pastors in the TSPM system in his era. Among the many Evangelicals, Gu Yuese is a peer of Wu in the sense that Gu was once the senior pastor (2005-16) of Chongyi church (Hangzhou), which is believed to be the largest church in China. Gu also worked as the president of the China Christian Council (CCC) of Zhejiang (2012-16), being active in the TSPM system and participating in various occasions of religious and political events inside and outside China. Yet, Gu became more widely known through his public statement against the local religious authorities,<sup>53</sup> and his arrest for reacting against the cross-

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<sup>53</sup> In July 2015, through the official website of the CCC of Zhejiang, Gu publicly spoke against the cross-removal campaign in Zhejiang province. He demanded a stop to the cross-removal campaign, saying that it had caused hatred, damaged the relationship between the CCP and the people and trampled on freedom of religious belief. Hu Ping, 'Gu Yuese Beibu Shuoming le Shenme' [What Does the Arrestment of Gu Yuese Reveal], *Zhongguo Renquan Shuangzhoukan* [China Human Rights Fortnightly] 178, (17 March 2016), accessed 5 April 2019, <http://biweeklyarchive.hrichina.org/article/32185.html>.

removal campaign in Zhejiang.<sup>54</sup> Gu was released on 24 December 2017 as the Prosecutors Office withdrew the prosecution.

As the former senior pastor of Chongyi church in Hangzhou, the capital city of Zhejiang province, Gu was aware of the social context of the church. He delivered sermons for Christian businessmen associations, addressing the social and business issues that they may be facing. Gu stresses the church as bearing social responsibility.<sup>55</sup> He is aware of the influence of the social context upon church life. He sees the diversity in society reflecting in the church, in which Christians are diverse in their pursuit of spirituality as well as social life.<sup>56</sup> Gu observes material abundance in society has been accompanied by indulgence of humanity. He describes the current era as post-modernism, and the lack of faith leads to moral decline in society. Under this social context, Christians should set a good example of moral integrity so that they can be a witness of Christ in the world. They should pray for the church as well as for the nation, praying for political leadership to lead the people in the right path. Gu believes that a true Christian will be able to bring forth ‘positive energy’ (*zheng nengliang*) in the church as well as in society.<sup>57</sup>

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<sup>54</sup> In January 2016, Gu was arrested on the accusation of ‘crime of misappropriation of funds.’ However, it is reported that a government official privately revealed that Gu did not have a problem in terms of finance. He was arrested simply because he spoke against the cross-removal campaign. ‘Zhejiang Gu Yuese Mushi Guanya Jin Er Nian Hou Wuzui Shifang’ [Pastor Gu Yuese of Zhejiang Was Discharged After Two-year Detention], China Aid, 25 December 2017, [https://www.chinaaid.net/2017/12/blog-post\\_36.html](https://www.chinaaid.net/2017/12/blog-post_36.html).

<sup>55</sup> Gu once admonished a Christian businessman not to lay off 250 employees during the financial crisis in 2008. His reason is that there are 250 families behind these staff members, and this is the Christian’s burden for the society. Gu Yuese, ‘You Yingxiangli Shengming de Sige Tezhi’ [Four Characteristics of An Influential Life], Sunday Service Sermon, Hangzhou Sicheng Church, 2015. Aisen, last modified 26 April 2019, <http://www.aiisen.com/p/10768.html>.

<sup>56</sup> Gu Yuese, ‘Zhuiqiu Heyi, Yao Caolian Beiqiu’ [Pursuing Unity Demands Practicing Captivity], Sunday Service Sermon, Hangzhou Chongyi Church, 2014. Fuyin Shibao [Gospel Times], 10 September 2014, <http://www.gospe times.cn/index.php/portal/article/index/id/24796>.

<sup>57</sup> Li Sheke, ‘Hangzhou Chongyi Tang Gu Yuese Mushi Mianli Shouxi Zhe Zuo “Junzun de Jisi”’ [Pastor Gu Yuese of Hangzhou Chongyi Church Encourages Baptised Believers to be ‘Royal Priests’], Fuyin Shibao [Gospel Times], 8 August 2013, <http://www.gospe times.cn/index.php/portal/article/index/id/20171>.

In 2013, in his sermon delivered at Haidian church in Beijing, Gu described that many of those with political power had gradually changed their view towards religion and Christianity. Particularly, people from all walks of life became interested in Chongyi church. Gu gave examples of Chongyi church's receiving favour from local authorities: special parking permit for church members on Sundays, government officials' invitation for Chongyi church to establish a church-based kindergarten and invitation of starting a new church in a business area in Hangzhou. This favour came because local authorities observed a positive impact from Chongyi church, including moral integrity, effective children education and contribution to social stability. Gu then urged the church to respond to people's interest by the love of Christ and the Christian's pious life.<sup>58</sup> Gu was encouraged by the impact that Chongyi church made in local areas, and this encouragement enhanced his burden for society and the nation. Even in June 2015, when the cross of the (Three-Self) Panshi church was removed by local authorities, after his emphasis of taking up the cross and following Jesus in the test of the cross-removal campaign, Gu also stated that Christians should proclaim the gospel of Jesus and pray for prosperity of the nation, peaceful life for its people and fairness and justice in the society.<sup>59</sup>

Like Wu Weiqing, Gu is aware of the social context and the church's social responsibility. However, Gu does not have a view of post-millennium like Wu Weiqing does, nor does Gu envision an ideal world to be established on earth.

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<sup>58</sup> Gu Yuese, 'Xinyang de Zhenzhi' [True Knowledge of Faith], Sunday Service Sermon, Beijing Haidian Church, 2013. Beijing Haidian Church, 28 April 2013, <http://www.hdchurch.org/sermon/2847>.

<sup>59</sup> 'Hangzhou Jiaohui Muzhe Guli Xintu "Mo Tingliu yu Fennu"' [Hangzhou Church Leader Admonishes Believers 'Not to Stop at Anger'], Fuyin Shibao [Gospel Times], 23 June 2015, <https://www.gospeltimes.cn/index.php/article/index/id/29115>.

Instead, Gu states that Christians live as sojourners on earth. Compared to the temporal and limited life on earth, there is eternity in Christ.<sup>60</sup> Whereas life on earth is short, life in heaven is everlasting. The Christian is therefore hoping for eternity in the new heaven and new earth. Although there is God's blessing in this life, there is a more beautiful home in heaven.<sup>61</sup> Since Christ's love is overwhelming, a more beautiful home is prepared for Christians in heaven.<sup>62</sup> Gu is therefore inclined to the transcendent dimension of the Christian faith, although he is aware of the church's social responsibility and definitely encourages an open engagement with the socio-political context.

It is clear that both Wu and Gu have a strong social concern. They both encourage active engagement with the socio-political context, stressing the Christian's responsibility and possible impact towards society. To a certain extent, they both have been popular figures in the TSPM system. Nevertheless, one may recall a contrast between Wu's 'citizen of the country first' speech recorded by the BBC journalist and Gu's public statement against local religious authorities. Wu kept the 'red line' untouched, but Gu was arrested for his statement. It should be noted that this is not just a matter of different strategies between Wu and Gu. Although they both generally feature Evangelical theology, Wu anticipates an ideal world to be established as a post-millennial kingdom on earth, while Gu clearly expresses his hope for a more beautiful home in heaven.

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<sup>60</sup> Li, 'Hangzhou Chongyi Tang Gu Yuese.'

<sup>61</sup> Wu Jialing, 'Zhejiang Muzhe Gu Yuese, Tan Shipian 23 Pian de 6 Da Zhufu' [Zhejiang Pastor Gu Yuese Talks about 6 Blessings from Psalm 23], Christian Daily, 12 September 2013, <http://www.cdn.org.tw/News.aspx?key=3839>.

<sup>62</sup> Gu, 'Xinyang de Zhenzhi.'

Perhaps some clue of older generation figures can help to explain their difference. Gu was a close student of Xu Sixue, who was one of the favourite students of Jia Yuming. Thus, Gu is a disciple handed down in a direct line from Jia. As Jia being an Evangelical who struggled after joining the TSPM, it is not surprising if Gu learned well from Xu Sixue, tracing a direct line influence from Jia. Xin-en understands that Jia joined the TSPM due to naivety, and Jia later regretted it. Yet Gu, a disciple tracing back to Jia's influence, could no longer bear humiliation under the TSPM.<sup>63</sup>

While Gu was influenced by Xu, eventually by Jia, Wu is traced to a connection with Chen Zemin (1917-2018), who was a theological liberal in the TSPM. Chen taught at the NUTS for almost five decades. In the early 1980s, Wu was Chen's student at NUTS. Wu once said that Chen was a treasure to the Chinese church and an indispensable treasure to the seminaries in China.<sup>64</sup> Despite a once complicated background, Chen's theology is clearly liberal.<sup>65</sup> In the early 1950s, Chen explained that the urgent task of theological research is to survive under the dramatic social change.<sup>66</sup> In the long run, Chen praised Wu Yaozong as a prophetic

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<sup>63</sup> Xin-en, 'Rao Bukai de Jueze.'

<sup>64</sup> Wang Zhenglu, 'Chen Zemin Mushi Jieshou Fenghuang Weishi Caifang' [Pastor Chen Zemin Accepted Interview by Fenghuang TV], Fuyin Shibao [Gospel Times], 14 February 2011, <http://www.gospeentimes.cn/index.php/article/index/id/8930>.

<sup>65</sup> Chen was the third generation Christian in his family. In 1931 when Chen was 14 years old, he attended a revival meeting conducted by Song Shangjie and felt inspired to be an evangelist. Also, Chen's church had a Baptist conservative background and advocated an independent figure like Wang Mingdao. However, Chen later studied at Hujiang University, during which time he came to have contact with YMCA leaders in China. After graduation from Hujiang University, Chen was recommended by Bishop Ding Guangxun to study at Jinling Theological Seminary, in which Chen started to have contact with modernist theology.

<sup>66</sup> Chen Zemin, *Qiusuo Yu Jianzheng-Chen Zemin Wenxuan* [Quest and Witness-Selected Works of Chen Zemin] (Shanghai: Lianghui Press, 2007), 12-19. Cf. Liu Ruomin, 'Xinyang Xunqiu yu Shenxue Tansuo-Chen Zemin Ji Qi Qiusuo yu Jianzheng' [Faith Seeking and Theological Searching-Chen Zemin and His Quest and Witness], *Jinling Shenxue Zhi* [Nanjing Theological Review] 108, no.3 (2016): 77.

theologian.<sup>67</sup> Chen was also a constant supporter of Bishop Ding Guangxun through the years, describing *Collected Works of Ding Guangxun* as an important milestone of Chinese theology.<sup>68</sup> Chen insists that his theology is open (*kaifang*) and orthodox. Just as that of Bishop Ding Guangxun. Chen admits that he is in the new school (*xin pai*), and his openness in theology is characterised by being rationalised and socially concerned.<sup>69</sup> It may be difficult to measure how much influence Wu has received from Chen, considering that Wu features a generally Evangelical theology. Nevertheless, Wu's connection with Chen somehow helps to explain Wu's post-millennialism and his pragmatic approach of dealing with civil authorities.

Despite the differences between Wu and Gu, they nevertheless share a strong social concern and propose the church's open engagement with the socio-political context. Compared to their older generation figures like Wang Weifan, who drew a strong motivation from Chinese culture, and Jia Yuming, Yang Shaotang and Chen Chonggui who were rather focused in their Evangelical faith and failed to cooperate with the Communist regime, Wu and Gu have moved to an increasingly social concern and propose an open engagement with society.

### 7.3 A General Trend: From Detachment to Attachment

Through the previous sections the evolution from Lin Xiangao and his contemporaries' privatised faith to Sun Yi and his peers' public engagement was noted. The evolution from Wang Weifan's culture-driven socio-political approach

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<sup>67</sup> Chen, *Qiusuo Yu Jianzheng*, 111.

<sup>68</sup> Ding, *Ding Guangxun Wenji*, 7.

<sup>69</sup> Zhang Lude, 'Fuyin Shibao Zhuanfang Zhongguo Jidujiao Zhuming Shenxuejia, Shenxue Jiaoyujia Chen Zemin Jiaoshou' [Gospel Times Interview with Well-known Chinese Theologian, Theological Educator Professor Chen Zemin], Fuyin Shibao [Gospel Times], 24 December 2009, <http://www.gospeltimes.cn/index.php/portal/article/index/id/5873>.

and his Evangelical colleagues' silence to Wu Weiqing and his peer Gu Yuese's social concern and engagement was also discussed. In these two evolutionary trends, the former trend reveals the evolution in the house church tradition and the latter trend represents the evolution in the TSPM system. A remaining question is if a general evolutionary trend can be identified between the two periods: the former period (1980s – early-1990s) and the latter period (mid-1990s – 2010s). This section will examine the answer to this question.

Both Lin Xiangao and Wang Weifan, though one from house church and the other from the Three-Self church, dreamed of or aspired to something that was not a direct response towards the popular or urgent issues in the socio-political context. In other words, their theological interests were somehow detachable from the immediate socio-political context. Neither Lin's exhortation regarding eternal rewards nor Wang's cultural approach to Chinese Christianity directly addressed the socio-political context in the former period, which was characterised by themes like Reform and Opening Up policy, socialist market economy, the rise of materialism and integrity crisis. Lin maintained consistency in his path of disengagement. Even when he occasionally mentioned issues of moral decline, he did not propose a new approach in dealing with emerging social issues. Lin seemed to believe that perseverance on a pious Christian life and pursuit of eternal rewards would lead the Christian through all circumstances.

Compared to Lin, Wang engaged in various historical, social, political and cultural areas, and his interest and focus changed over time. In his concern on a unified Chinese church, Wang explains his historical view, discusses the path of the TSPM and describes the development of Three-Self churches. In his view on the

church's relationship with the state and the society, Wang discusses freedom of religious belief, the spiritual progress of the socialist cause, the church's adaptation to socialism, Christianity's distinctive role and contribution to the socialist China and the church's ethical function and prophetic role in the face of moral and social crises. Wang therefore appears engaging with a wide range of topics. However, Wang frequently bases his discussions of socio-political topics on a socialist perspective, and he indicates the existence of a pragmatic concern in the church's adaptation to socialism. His arguments on some of the socio-political topics are weak and superficial. When the TSPM's theological reconstruction caused conflict and discouragement to Evangelicals, and social crises arose after the mid-1990s, Wang would have a general disappointment towards the TSPM and the socio-political contexts. While all these elements might go up and down through the years, Chinese culture plays a steady and crucial role in all of Wang's dominant theological concerns, including a unified Chinese church, a Chinese theology and the church's engagement with the state and the society. In view of this, although Wang was concerned about and engaged with both the socio-political context and Chinese culture, the socio-political context might have been something that Wang had to struggle with, while a cultural approach to Chinese Christianity was something that Wang was truly aspiring for.

While both Lin and Wang aspired to something detached from their immediate context, it was also true for their contemporaries. Li Tian-en, Yuan Xiangchen and Xie Moshan did not leave many writings to present certain theological themes. Nevertheless, it is clear enough that, like Lin, they disengaged with the socio-political context and focused on independence of the church and the



piety of the Christian life. For Jia Yuming, Yang Shaotang and Chen Chonggui, their participation in the TSPM seemed to be mainly due to pragmatic concerns, or perhaps, naivety. Since that was the case, their theological orientation did not tend to support an approach of engagement with the context in the 1950s and the 1960s.

Compared to Lin, Wang and their contemporaries, Sun Yi and Wu Weiqing's interests and theological reflections are tightly related to their socio-political context. They both reflect and focus on what is at hand and urgent in society. The social and political problems in their context are so urgent that they seem to have no leisure or interest to dream of something that is not directly related to the context. It is not saying that Sun and Wu do not have some kind of dream or aspiration. Instead, Sun envisions 'a city set on a hill,' and Wu aspires to an ideal world intended by Christ. Yet clearly, both Sun's vision and Wu's aspiration are direct responses towards the serious and urgent problems in their immediate socio-political context. Sun highly treasures knowing Jesus Christ in the Christian life as well as the pious spirituality of the house church tradition. However, he spends much more space in his writings explaining the public nature and integrity of the church in supporting the church's open engagement with the wider society. Wu emphasises people's conversion to Christ, and he frequently elaborates a Christ-like life inspired by a sharp contrast between Christ and humans. Yet his faith-in-Christ is proposed as a solution to existing socio-political problems and a means to realise an ideal society on earth. Sun and Wu's contemporaries Yu Jie, Wang Yi, Jin Mingri and Gu Yuese all indicate an interest and direct responses toward the socio-political context, despite their different ecclesiastical and theological backgrounds.

When comparing the two periods, with the former period represented by Lin and Wang and the latter period represented by Sun and Wu, an evolutionary trend of their socio-political approaches can be concisely described as moving from detachment to attachment. Lin and Wang's respective ideals were not direct responses to the popular themes or issues in the wider society. Their primary interest was certain kinds of ideal of Christianity, instead of direct dealing with the socio-political context. Moving into the latter period, a younger generation, represented by figures like Sun and Wu, demonstrate an increasing interest and express insightful thought on open engagement with the wider society. Their major theological themes are direct responses towards the socio-political context. They reflect primarily and directly on the social and political issues in their time.

This evolutionary trend took place in a background of social changes as well as ecclesiastical development from the 1980s to the 2010s, which is divided into two periods. In the former period, the country focused on the growth of market economy and the improvement of material life for its people. When society was growing in various aspects and social problems had not seriously emerged, the church focused on spread of the Gospel, growth of the church numbers and increase of Christian population. During this time, Christians like Lin and Wang, also influenced by their respective theological persuasion or cultural ambition, felt the relative ease in the context and continued to express their ideals for Christianity, which were not direct responses to major social themes in their time. When serious moral deterioration and social injustice became pressing reality in the Chinese society from the middle of the 1990s, the Protestant communities also started to produce a new generation of more

educated and society-oriented Christians, like Sun, Wu and their peers, who thereby responded to the social changes.

Besides a background of social and ecclesiastical changes, Sun and Wu's personal backgrounds and experiences also contribute to their making of a theological shift from the former period. Sun majored in religious philosophy in his PhD studies. His later advocacy of Neo-Calvinism comes as no surprise, as it is a highly intellectualised theological persuasion. Inheriting the house church tradition, he certainly appreciates a simple and fervent spirituality, which emphasises themes like a pious Christian life and a longing for eternity, as described by figures like Lin. But a basically inner spiritual piety does not satisfy Sun. A Neo-Calvinist understanding of the purposes of the church, a communal piety and an outward dimension of spirituality intellectually bring Sun a new conviction on the church's role and responsibility in a changing society.

In the case of Wu, his ministry-focused work can be explained from his educational and ecclesiastical experience. Born in the early 1960s, Wu grew up in the period of Cultural Revolution and later the start of the Reform and Opening Up policy. In both periods, traditional Chinese culture was depreciated or attacked, even to a certain extent, destroyed. It is therefore no surprise that Wu indicates no interest in traditional Chinese culture. Wu received theological educations through his bachelor, master and DMin programs, and all these degrees are ministry rather than academic focused. In line with his education and from the beginning of his ministry, Wu has been involved in local church ministry for years. Taking all these into account, Wu on the one hand is not interested in traditional Chinese culture, and on the other hand, looks into the interest of the masses in his theological reflection.

When socio-political problems become serious in a dramatically changing society, it is natural for Wu to indicate concern for social injustice and unfairness, under which the masses, especially the underprivileged, have become the victims. Compared to Wang Weifan, who would consider himself a noble person (*junzi*) overseeing the world from a high ground perspective, Wu instead portrays a humble ‘from below’ perspective of the masses.

The contribution of their personal backgrounds and experiences suggest that Sun and Wu, though they are theologically supported by figures like Yu Jie, Wang Yi, Jin Mingri and Gu Yuese, by no means speak for all their Protestant contemporaries in China. Along with Reformed Christians like Sun, Yu and Wang, there are also a significant number of Chinese Pentecostals and charismatics who will place their primary interest in spiritual vitality instead of social engagement, and their spirituality is exercised in a basically more private manner compared to those of the Reformed.<sup>70</sup> With regard to traditional Chinese culture, Wu’s case of disinterest seems to be a common phenomenon. The dramatic social and cultural changes from the Cultural Revolution and later the socialist market economy without proper moral code have seriously damaged even destroyed classic form Chinese culture. With this situation, among the contemporaries of Sun and Wu, it is unlikely to find many who still appreciate Chinese culture in its traditional form. Nevertheless, Chinese culture, especially Confucianism, in its contemporary form continues to influence Chinese people’s social conduct and way of thinking. The absence of Chinese culture in Wu’s discussions does not deny the continuous influence of Chinese culture among

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<sup>70</sup> For some explorations and discussions on Chinese Pentecostals and charismatics, cf. Yang Fenggang, Joy K.C. Tong and Allan H. Anderson eds. *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity* (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017). See also Luke Wesley, *The Church in China: Persecuted, Pentecostal and Powerful* (Baguio, Philippines: AJPS Books, 2004).

Protestants and the masses. All these suggest the diversity of Chinese Protestantism. Yet, Sun and Wu, together with Yu, Wang, Jin and Gu, still represent significant voices from the Protestant communities. Considering the serious socio-political changes from the mid-1990s, Sun and Wu's theological reflections and responses toward the context make reasonable sense, and they should be understood and followed by many Protestants in China.

To sum up, the present study shows the changes moving from Lin Xiangao's pursuit of eternal rewards through a pious Christian life to Sun Yi's vision of the church as 'a city set on a hill' impacting society with its openness and integrity. It also shows the changes moving from Wang Weifan's aspiration to a cultural approach to Chinese Christianity to Wu Weiqing's Christian concern of social justice for the masses. Along the same lines, while Lin and Wang's Evangelical contemporaries disengage with the socio-political context, Sun and Wu's Evangelical peers propose to openly engage with the wider society. Through all these changes, the present study identifies an evolutionary trend moving from context-detached aspirations to context-attached responses.

#### 7.4 General Trend in the Historical Context

As the identified general trend took place in the period from the 1980s to the 2010s, it is worthwhile to review and discuss how this trend can be understood in the overall historical evolution of socio-political engagement from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. In the first half of the 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was basically the modernist, like Zhao Zichen, Xu Baoqian and Wu Yaozong, who engaged with the socio-political context, although they went through ups and downs and did not bear much fruit in their engagement with society and Chinese culture. Meanwhile, Evangelicals had their

primary interest in spirituality and church growth and thus paid little attention to social or cultural engagement. When the CCP came to power in China in 1949, the situation was not black and white. On the one hand, the CCP held atheism and an anti-religion, even anti-Christianity attitude. On the other hand, the ‘Liberation of China’ seemed to present an encouraging future for the nation and its people, and the CCP called for all people to participate in constructing a new China. It was under mixed and uncertain circumstances that a few Evangelicals like Jia Yuming, Yang Shaotang, Chen Chonggui and Wang Weifan joined the TSPM. In the early 1950s, both modernists and a few participating Evangelicals seemed to be active in discussing the development of Christianity in the new China. However, from the late 1950s, China was gradually led into waves of Anti-Rightist Movement and later the Cultural Revolution, during which Protestants, liberals and Evangelicals alike, were repressed and forced to be silent.

From the 1980s to the 1990s, it was mainly the cultural Christians who introduced Christianity to the public through their translations of Western Christian writings and their own writings on the potential role of Christianity in China. Although they did not participate in church life and there may not be evidence of their contribution to church growth, intellectually, they brought a positive image of Christianity to the public. To a certain extent, due to their intellectual and positive introduction of Christianity, the ‘Christianity fever’ at the time, to which they also partially contributed, received relative tolerance by the authorities.

Also, from the 1980s, Wang Weifan was a significant Evangelical figure who kept an active approach of socio-political engagement. Although highly appreciating traditional Chinese culture, something of common interest with the cultural

Christians, Wang's Evangelical conviction and his participation in church life made him different from those cultural Christians. Wang was an exceptional Evangelical figure who openly engaged with the socio-political context and Chinese culture from the 1980s. However, while Wang's Evangelical stand associates him with the vast majority of Chinese Protestants, his strong and elitist cultural aspiration makes him different from later Evangelical figures like Sun Yi and Wu Weiqing, who focus on open engagement with society.

Sun and Wu started their church life from the 1990s. Yet it was into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century that they became productive in writing and ministry. Therefore, their theological reflections took place in a time when cultural Christians were no longer playing a major role. It was also a time when many Protestant churches, especially those in urban centres, experienced significant growth and development in aspects like education and social engagement. Through decades of growth from the 1980s, the vast majority of Chinese Protestants, including those in Three-Self churches and those in the house churches, have been following Evangelical persuasion. Local church members pay the price of being oppressed or despised by relatives, friends and authorities and usually have no interest in a liberal theology. Meanwhile, from the 1980s, the theological liberals are those intellectuals and scholars existing mainly in universities, CCC seminaries and Bible colleges. Bishop Ding Guangxun was a well-known Protestant and political figure influencing certain areas. Yet he can hardly be considered as speaking for Evangelicals in local churches. To sum up the above discussions, Sun and Wu propose open engagement with society in a time when cultural Christians receive less attention, liberals lose grassroots support and Wang Weifan's cultural aspiration to a Chinese Christianity turns inadequate in

addressing the increasing social problems. In view of this, Sun and Wu, together with other figures like Yu Jie, Wang Yi, Jin Mingri and Gu Yuese, represent a new generation of Evangelicals who started to present a major voice of socio-political engagement.

It is also this new generation of Evangelicals who have made a significant shift in the socio-political engagement of Chinese Protestantism. In the whole 20<sup>th</sup> century, it was primarily liberals who indicated interest and presented their approaches towards the wider society and Chinese culture. Evangelicals did not present a major voice in these matters. When Wang Weifan, as an Evangelical writing in the 1950s and later from the 1980s to the 2000s, presented an interest towards the nation and society, his socio-political engagement was rather driven by his cultural aspiration, and his idea of an elitist Chinese theology did not represent the theological level of common Evangelical Christians. Into the early 21<sup>st</sup> century, it is figures like Sun and Wu, while representing numerous Evangelicals from local churches, who present the major voices of socio-political engagement. In this sense, the identified general trend bears great significance not only for the period starting from the 1980s but also for the time beginning from the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. It marks a shift over a century, with Evangelicals starting to play a major role in open socio-political engagement.

### 7.5 Conclusion

This chapter explores and discusses the evolutions of socio-political approaches between certain Protestant figures from the 1980s to the 2010s. The general evolution marks a shift of theological approach in the mid-1990s. In the former period from the 1980s to the early-1990s, while Lin Xiangao and his house



church peers disengaged with the wider society and focused on a privatised faith, Wang Weifan had his primary interest in a cultural approach to Chinese Christianity. In the latter period from the mid-1990s to the 2010s, Evangelical figures of a younger generation from both house churches and Three-Self churches turned their interest to open engagement with the wider society. Although each figure in the present study has his own particular emphasis and there are slight differences between figures of the same group, a general evolutionary trend has been identified as moving from context-detached aspirations in the former period to context-attached responses in the latter period. In other words, from the 1980s to the 2010s, with the mid-1990s as the rough time of shift, Evangelicals have moved towards an increasing social concern and an approach of open engagement with the wider society.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The present thesis has explored the historical evolution of Protestant socio-political engagement in the post-1980s era, by studying the dominant theological concerns and socio-political approaches of four representative Evangelical church figures, across two major periods, a former period (1980s to early-1990s) and a latter period (mid-1990s to 2010s). Beyond these focused case studies, the thesis has further identified and analysed the evolutionary trends of broader Evangelical groups from both house churches and Three-Self churches, also across the two periods. This concluding chapter will give a summary of the findings of this research, explain a changing context in the second half of the 2010s and offer some final thoughts and future prospects.

### 8.1 Summary of Findings

The present study shows that there are three major trends of the evolution of Chinese Evangelicals' socio-political approaches from the 1980s to the 2010s. The first trend is of house church Evangelicals, moving from a private faith, as represented by Lin Xiangao and his contemporaries, to a public faith, as represented by Sun Yi and his peers.

Lin's dominant theological concerns include a pious Christian life and rewards in eternity. His writing and ministry covered both before and after the Cultural Revolution, and his dominant theological concerns stayed constant throughout his life. With these concerns, Lin kept silent and disengaged with society,

politics and culture. However, while Lin was silent, insisting on the independence of the church from the state and exhorting Christians to live a pious life and seek eternal rewards, his seemingly disengaged approach with the socio-political context was in fact a radical way of engagement. As to Lin's contemporaries, on the one hand, they all rejected the TSPM and refused to cooperate with the CCP on religious matters; on the other hand, they also emphasised the independence of the church and spiritual piety in the Christian life. In pursuit of a privatised faith, they did not express any interest in changing society or engaging in politics.

In the latter period, the dominant theological concerns of Sun Yi include upholding the integrity and the openness of the church. These theological concerns of Sun have encountered serious challenges and difficulties due to government's oppression, but Sun has held fast to his concerns and vision. Compared to the former period group, Sun moved his interest from a privatised faith to Christian witness in the public sphere. Sun's primary approach to social engagement is through the church becoming a model of moral integrity and proper organisational polity, by which the church should influence people and organisations in the broader society. A number of other house church figures in the latter period likewise express their social concern, emphasising the political application of Reformed theology, upholding the Christian community as a model for society and modelling a Christianised family and social services. Although they may have differing emphases, they all propose an open approach of socio-political engagement.

The second evolutionary trend is of Three-Self churches, moving from a focus on culture to a focus on the society. Prior to the 1980s, many of Wang Weifan's Evangelical colleagues failed to cooperate with the TSPM and the CCP and

were ultimately silenced. In the former period, Wang alone managed to keep a culture-driven socio-political approach. In the latter period, Wu Weiqing and his peer Gu Yuese have expressed their increasing social concern and have proposed the church's responsibility for and active engagement with society.

Wang Weifan's dominant theological concerns include a unified Chinese church, a Chinese theology integrated with Chinese culture, and Chinese Christianity's engagement with the state and the society. Wang kept these concerns over time. Although his engagement was involved in broad areas, Chinese culture was a strong and steady motivation and his socio-political engagement was driven by Chinese cultural teaching. For Wang's Evangelical colleagues, they joined the TSPM with pragmatic concerns and were eventually silenced.

In the latter period, Wu Weiqing's dominant theological concerns included a Christ-centred theology and an ideal world of social justice. Wu has kept his concerns over time as he has managed to run the church under changing government restrictions. Wu has moved from Wang Weifan's culture-oriented concern to a society-oriented concern. In his engagement with society, Wu focuses on issues of social injustice and limits his engagement to helping the poor and the under-privileged. Meanwhile, Wu proposes that the ultimate means of solving societal injustices is through the conversion of the masses to Christianity. As Wu's peer, Gu Yuese is also aware of the church's social responsibility, and emphasises a good Christian model and witness for Christ in society.

The third evolutionary trend, which describes the evolution from the former period to the latter period and covers both house church figures and TSPM church figures, is identified as moving from detachment to attachment towards the socio-

political context. In the former period, the dominant theological concerns of Lin Xiangao, Wang Weifan and their contemporaries were ones that were detached from their immediate socio-political context. Wang was a special case in the sense that he proposed both the church's adaptation to socialism and a Chinese Christianity integrated with Chinese culture. However, his socio-political engagement was significantly driven by relevant Chinese cultural teachings, and a cultural approach to Chinese Christianity was his true aspiration. In the latter period, the theological concerns of Sun Yi, Wu Weiqing and their contemporaries were ones that were attached to their immediate socio-political context, responding directly to the context. This third evolutionary trend indicates that Protestants of the younger generation moved their interests and concerns from previous generation's context-detached aspirations to newer, context-attached responses.

The present study selected figures from both house churches and Three-Self churches with hopes to discern divergences between the theologies from the two groups. However, the third evolutionary trend indicates that Sun, Wu and their peers, from both house churches and Three-Self churches, all moved from the older generation's context-detached aspirations to context-attached responses. They all moved towards an increasing social concern. Contrary to the dominant discourse, which divides the respective theologies of house churches from Three-Self churches, this third trend indicates a general convergence instead of a divergence between the theologies of both groups.

Meanwhile, there is an interesting phenomenon between their theologies. While Lin focuses on a pious Christian life and eternal rewards and conducts discussions based on scriptures, Sun openly proposes social engagement and

employs a theological theory like Neo-Calvinism. As to Three-Self churches, whereas Wang is more varied in the areas and theories he discusses, Wu directs his focus on social issues and employs the scriptures to support his discussions. In this phenomenon, Sun tends to move from Lin's low-profile scripture-based theology to a high-profile theoretically discussed theology. At the same time, Wu tends to move from Wang's wide-ranging and highly theoretical discussion to a limited scope and scripture-based discussion. In other words, while Sun intends to have his theological ideas widely spread, Wu tends to express his ideas in a reserved or cautious manner. Though interesting, this phenomenon is not difficult to understand, considering that, in the latter period, when house church Christians wished to 'rise to the surface' and make their theological thoughts known to the public, those in the Three-Self churches tended to carry on ministry with a low profile. This interesting phenomenon suggests that the methodologies of their theology are not necessarily connected to their church background, whether it be the house church or the Three-Self church.

Nevertheless, there is an obvious difference in terms of their theological expression being affected by the different legal statuses of their respective church backgrounds. The four selected representative figures are all aware of the legal status of their churches and express theologies accordingly. Both Lin and Sun oppose liberal theology and the TSPM, freely confess what they consider essential and do not hesitate to express something that may offend the government. On the contrary, Wang and Wu, though being Evangelical, try to negotiate with the religious policy and are careful not to violate the government's 'red line.' Thus, as the Communist government is trying to maintain control over religious affairs, the Evangelical's

theological approaches and expressions are still substantially affected by their respective church-state relationships.

### 8.2 Concluding Thoughts and Future Prospects

It has been observed that the theological concerns and socio-political approaches of the Evangelical have been evolving from the 1980s, with three evolutionary trends identified. The findings have covered roughly four decades from the 1980s to the 2010s. However, it should be noted that the socio-political context has experienced significant changes in the second half of the 2010s, basically due to the change of the state's political leadership. The changes are, in general, a reverse of the leniency of the latter period, and thus presents serious challenges and difficulties to Christianity. Before moving into some concluding thoughts and future prospects, it is necessary to briefly mention the changes in the context.

In recent years, from around 2013, China has witnessed increasing control, even oppression, of religions in general and Christianity in particular. It has been reported that under the leadership of Xi Jinping, Christianity faces the most severe oppression since the Cultural Revolution.<sup>1</sup> After the cross-removal campaign began taking place in Zhejiang province from the early 2010s, there have been instances of crosses being forcefully removed from churches in other provinces across China. In some cases, church buildings have even been demolished. In 2018, three prominent house churches were banned by authorities: Zion Church in Beijing, Early Rain

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<sup>1</sup> Liang Dianxin, 'Jidutu Mianlin Xinde Da Bipo' [Christians Are Facing New Serious Oppression], *Zhongguo Renquan Shuangzhoukan* [China Human Rights Biweekly] 179, (18-31 March 2016), accessed 30 May 2019, <http://biweeklyarchive.hrichina.org/article/32402.html>. See also Leung, 'Xi Jinping's Religious Freedom Policy vs Human Rights.'

Covenant Church in Chengdu and Rong Gui Li Church in Guangzhou.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, there have been reports of instances where school students have been asked to report if they or their parents are Christians, recalling of Cultural Revolution era practices. Others have reported that some Three-Self church Christians sing ‘red songs’ inside their churches. All these indicate that the CCP is moving towards a tight control and harsh oppression against Christianity.

There have been other instances of religious control. It has been reported that numerous re-education camps have recently been built in Xinjiang province, with some estimating over one million Uyghur Muslims detained in these camps. It has also been reported that Buddhist monks show their allegiance to the CCP and the state by singing ‘red songs’ and conducting national flag raising ceremonies in their temples. Besides an increasing control over religions, China has also witnessed the centralisation of power and an increasing crackdown against human rights defence activities. In 2015, the so-called ‘709 crackdown’ was a nation-wide crackdown of Chinese human rights lawyers and activists.<sup>3</sup> In 2018, China’s Constitution was amended to remove the term limits for the Chinese president, enabling the current president Xi Jinping to remain in power until his death. This amendment sends a strong signal of personal centralisation rather than simply party centralisation. All these changes suggest that China’s politics have recently been moving towards restriction rather than freedom. It is moving towards the opposite of a civil society.

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<sup>2</sup> Rong Gui Li Church, formerly called Da Ma Zhan Gospel Church, was found by Lin Xiangao and it continued to exist after Lin’s pass away in 2013.

<sup>3</sup> On 9 July 2015, more than 200 Chinese human rights lawyers and activists were jailed, disbarred or placed under surveillance by Chinese authorities. Cf. Chinese Human Rights Lawyer Group, ‘709 Da Zhuabu Si Zhounian Shengming’ [Statement on the Fourth Anniversary of 709 Crackdown], *Zhongguo Renquan Shuangzhoukan* [China Human Rights Biweekly] 265, (5-18 July 2019), 10 July 2019, <https://www.hrichina.org/chs/zhong-guo-ren-quan-shuang-zhou-kan/zhong-guo-ren-quan-lu-shi-tuan-709da-zhua-bu-4zhou-nian-sheng>.



These changes seem to continue its cause, and they present a harsh, even hostile context for Christianity and all other religions.

As the findings of this thesis cover about four decades and the last few years of the 2010s have witnessed a changing context with new challenges. While reflecting on the theologies of the four selected case studies, what can be said about the potential future evolution of Evangelical approaches?

Lin Xiangao has been highly regarded among house church Christians, and his disengagement with the socio-political context represents a major path of house churches. His disengagement has basically been demonstrated through his stand against modernist theology, non-cooperation with the regime's religious policy and refusal to join the TSPM. These three positions of Lin were engendered decades ago when certain situations emerged, including the fundamentalist-modernist controversy in the 1920s, the Communists' takeover of China in 1949 and modernists' lead of the TSPM in the 1950s. Through decades of struggle in the socio-political context, Lin demonstrated several timeless values, which he held in his disengagement: (1) upholding the lordship of Christ; (2) obeying God rather than humans and (3) enduring oppression for the sake of faith. These values stood the test of time and became a great legacy for the house churches. Being a junior associate of Wang Mingdao, Lin was among other prominent Evangelicals like Li Tian-en, Yuan Xiangchen and Xie Moshan who also undertook the path of disengagement and were influential both before and after the Cultural Revolution. As for the younger generation of house church leaders, their open engagement is a response to the changing social, political and ecclesiastical contexts rather than being a denial of Lin's disengagement towards the context of his time. When proposing open

engagement, Sun Yi and others like Yu Jie and Wang Yi all inherit what the older generation highly values, which also lead them to refuse the TSPM and the regime's religious policy.

While Lin was part of the older generation, it is important to note his own significant influence and legacy. Generally speaking, Wang Mingdao was the major figure who initiated and led the path of refusal and non-cooperation. Although following Wang, Lin made his direct influence on a younger generation. Firstly, living until 2013 and having his iconic church in south China, Lin had direct contact with the younger generation of house church Christians. Secondly, Lin's self-identification as an Evangelical, instead of a fundamentalist, presented himself updated in the post-Cultural Revolution context, therefore, improving the relevancy of his writings for the younger generation. As compared to Lin's other contemporaries like Li Tian-en, Yuan Xiangchen and Xie Moshan, Lin left behind plenty of valuable writings. His *Lingyin* series reveals his pursuit of a pious Christian life and exhortation regarding eternal rewards, which help to explain his so-called disengagement as a radical way of engagement. Lin has been well known for his struggle and disengagement with the socio-political context. Yet, his disengagement as engagement, which is discussed in the present study, should be regarded as a significant and distinctive part of his legacy.

The present research shows the constancy of Lin's theology and his disengaging attitude towards the wider society. His approach of disengagement as engagement was radical and effective in times of serious socio-political control and religious oppression. With this approach, Lin's intent was to be disengaged with the present society in order to build an alternative society of the Christian community,

which in turn competed and challenged the broader Chinese society. However, by the mid-1990s, when the social context changed and began to feature increasing moral deterioration and serious social issues, Lin's disengagement expressed an attitude of indifference. When the changing context demands a renewed response, maintaining disengagement results in a loss of relevancy and reduction of effectiveness.

Therefore, it should be expected that Lin's approach of disengagement would adjust and take an active response to the moral deterioration and social unrest. In an active response, Lin's thoughts on a pious Christian life and eternal rewards, which are at its core the strength of his theology and spirituality, can be re-emphasised to help Christians combat materialism, secularism and religious consumerism. While the social context demands an active response, the political context may say otherwise.

Due to the recent political and religious suppression, distrust towards the Communist regime has increased. Under this situation, Lin's disengagement with politics and submission in civil matters can be kept as a discreet way of keeping the church independent. To sum up, in a changing context, Lin's original approach of disengagement as engagement may go through some adjustment of engaging society but disengaging politics.

Wang Weifan's aspiration of a unified Chinese church appeared possible since the TSPM caused unified worship services in the late-1950s among many Protestants. While the PRC and the TSPM provided an environment for this possibility, Wang's idea of a unified Chinese church is primarily inspired by Chinese cultural concepts like great harmony and a homogeneous view. Likewise, Cheng Jingyi's statement of the 'mystery of the Chinese people,' which caused Chinese Christians to dislike denominationalism and prefer church unification, may just refer

to Chinese cultural teaching like the great harmony. In terms of Chinese culture's role in church unification, Wang would prefer the liberal Cheng Jingyi's perspective rather than the perspective of the Evangelical Jia Yuming. However, Wang's Evangelical stance inevitably determined his conflict with a liberal TSPM leader like Bishop Ding Guangxun during theological reconstruction. In fact, this kind of theological conflict is to be expected by Evangelicals. Millard J. Erickson explains that Evangelicals have been cautious about ecumenism because they insist on agreement on most basic doctrines of belief as a precondition for union, and 'similar emotional experiences and cooperative endeavors are insufficient foundations for union.'<sup>4</sup> Meanwhile, being aware of biblical teaching on church unity, Erickson indicates that genuine convictions and principles could be a proper reason for church divisions and separation.<sup>5</sup> This view of Erickson may sound right to those Evangelicals who refuse to join the TSPM. Even if there was no theological reconstruction, a house church figure like Lin Xiangao would nonetheless describe the unity among those churches affiliated with the TSPM as 'by coercion or indifference.' But in Wang's case, although he chose to confront liberal teachings, he remained in the TSPM and did not call for separation. When unification could not be realised due to theological conflict, Wang chose not to abandon the cultural teaching on the great harmony. Thus, Wang's case indicates an unsolved tension between Chinese culture and an Evangelical stance, which Chinese Evangelicals will need to address.

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<sup>4</sup> Millard J. Erickson, *Christian Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House Company, 1985), 1142.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, 1146.

In aspiring towards a Chinese theology, Wang Weifan's high appreciation for traditional Chinese culture seems to find little resonance among contemporary Christians, and his idea of a Chinese theology seems to be the business of a few noble person Christians. This situation may be described by the Chinese idiom *qu gao he gua*, meaning that for those songs of a high pitch, there will be very few people who are able to join in the chorus. In other words, when something of a high level is presented, there will be very few people who can understand or appreciate it. The situation is no surprise, considering the unpopularity of ancient Chinese classics and the diminishment of traditional Chinese culture, largely due to movements like the New Culture Movement, the Cultural Revolution and later the development of the so-called socialist market economy, which followed materialism without an effective code of ethics.<sup>6</sup>

However, while others today may not be as appreciative of traditional Chinese culture as Wang, this by no means denies the remnant existence and value of traditional Chinese culture. It is notable that Chinese culture is evolving and taking a contemporary form. As Walter H. Slote comments, the 'external form and ancient style [of Confucianism] for the most part have disappeared.'<sup>7</sup> Yet, New Confucianism and Humanistic Buddhism emerged in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. More recently, *guo xue* (studies of ancient Chinese civilisation), although being utilised by the state for its own purpose, have received a certain level of popularity among

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<sup>6</sup> Li Yuehong explains the different history that mainland China, as compared to Taiwan, Hong Kong and some Asian countries, has gone through and the corresponding decline of Confucianism in mainland China. Li Yuehong, 'The Decline of Confucianism and the Proclamation of the Gospel in China' in *Pentecostalism in Context: Essays in Honor of William W. Menzies*. eds. Wonsuk Ma and Robert P. Menzies (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1997), 238-64.

<sup>7</sup> Walter H. Slote, 'Psychocultural Dynamics within the Confucian Family' in *Confucianism and the family* eds. Walter H. Slote and George A. De Vos (New York: State University of New York Press, 1998), 38.

scholars, academics and some common people.<sup>8</sup> While *guo xue* may involve ancient classics, the classics are nonetheless explained by or even translated into contemporary Chinese. Chinese culture is still a crucial element of Chinese identity for Chinese people. When this is the case, Chinese Protestants do not seem to cope well with Chinese cultural practices, which are still fairly common and presenting various challenges to the Christian's life and social relationship. Lin Xiangao's total rejection of Chinese cultural customs does not seem helpful, and Protestants have rarely accepted Wang Weifan's endorsement of cultural accommodation. Still, the Chinese Christian has to address Chinese culture and contemporary Chinese people's cultural experience in their daily life. A Chinese theology will need to approach Chinese culture appropriately. Therefore, although Wang's elitist cultural approach of doing Chinese theology may not be widely appreciated, and the term 'traditional' Chinese culture is no longer accurate, his cultural approach to Chinese theology is still a valuable reminder of the significant role Chinese culture has for developing a Chinese theology.

The value of Wang's cultural approach is affirmed, but his cultural approach nonetheless bears certain shortcomings or weaknesses in a broad context. Wang highly values a cultural quality of 'Chineseness' as the essence of his idea of a Chinese theology. However, this cultural 'Chineseness' may not be exclusively essential to all Chinese people. Many contemporary Chinese people live a modern lifestyle, which features a variety of cultural influences and mentality. Some Chinese Christians, as bearers of God's image, share a common quality of 'humanity.' They

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<sup>8</sup> For a discussion on the recent so-called '*guo xue* fever,' see Liu Lijuan and Zhao Jinyuan, 'Dangqian Guo Xue Re de Yuanyin ji Yiyi Tanxi' [An Exploration and Analysis on the Reason and Meaning of the Current Guo Xue Fever], *Dali Xueyuan Xuebao* [Journal of Dali University] 7, no. 3 (2008): 17-20.

may develop theology in diverse directions, including those with rigorous reasoning, instead of being confined by something labelled as ‘Chineseness.’ Thus, Wang’s ‘Chineseness’ is not applicable or meaningful for these Christians. Another weakness of Wang’s cultural approach is an insider’s perspective. Wang seems to take a cultural quality of ‘Chineseness’ as opposed to something that is foreign or Western, and this brings about a primarily, if not exclusively, insider’s perspective. But this insider’s perspective may result in blindness in certain areas. Wang emphasises the advantages of Chinese culture. Yet, he fails to realise that some characters of Chinese culture, like inclination towards personal feeling and cultural sentiment, may cause weaknesses like lack of rationality and proper reasoning. Like the Chinese idiom ‘*dang ju zhe mi, pang guan zhe qing*’ (the onlooker sees most of the game), an outsider, or observer, of Wang’s cultural approach to Chinese theology may be able to offer insights that the insider fails to observe. Therefore, Wang’s Chinese theology will need to learn from the perspectives of observers, both Chinese and non-Chinese, from inside and outside of China.

Wang’s view of the church’s close relationship with the state and the society and his active socio-political engagement were based on his historical view, his understanding of the TSPM and the CCP and his high appreciation of Chinese cultural teaching on one’s moral obligation towards his or her nation and society. While the first two bases became weak in a later time, a strong sense of moral obligation provided Wang a steady motivation, and it remained active through decades of Wang’s socio-political engagement. However, while Chinese culture may provide a strong motivation, it does not provide helpful or sufficient guidelines on how to engage with the socio-political context. In Wang’s case, his socialist-oriented

discussions do not seem effective to the state or appealing to Christians. His discussions on topics like Marxism, Leninism, Mao Zedong thought, Deng Xiaoping theory and the spiritual progress of the socialist cause seem to be on behalf of the church or Christianity. Yet, his discussions are often a manoeuvre of the subjects therefore lacking profundity. While his discussions lack profundity, the political context from the second half of the 2010s, which is characterised by a hazy concept of ‘the Chinese dream’ and increasingly tight control over social, political and religious life, allows less and less space for open and direct discussion on political topics. As to moral decline and social injustice, Wang’s discussion on the church’s ethical function and prophetic role may sound appealing. Although a sense of Chinese moral obligation is behind Wang’s discussion, he nevertheless employs various biblical teachings to explain the church’s ethical function and prophetic role. In other words, Wang draws significant guidelines from biblical teachings. Therefore, to sum it up, Wang’s culture-driven socio-political approach has its strength in a strong motivation from Chinese culture, but it will likewise need to draw from other sources for the necessary guidelines for engagement.

Sun Yi’s open approach towards the wider society represents a new perspective of socio-political engagement among urban house church Christians. His elaboration of the public nature of the church explains a wide common ground, even overlapping fields, between the church and social organisations, and his understanding of a dual identity of the church compels its engagement with the public sphere. Sun’s open approach and advocacy of Neo-Calvinism or, broadly speaking, Reformed theology, are shared by other urban intellectual Christians, like Yu Jie and Wang Yi, who have the advantage of relatively high education, sufficient



experience of urban life and more exposure to the wider world. These Reformed intellectuals are ‘a few significant ones’ in the sense that though they are a few, their views and voices in the public sphere have the potential to bring forth significant change in the landscape of Christianity’s public engagement in the Chinese society. Therefore, Sun’s approach of open engagement indicates a new development of and significant expansion from the house church tradition, and it presents a rising diversity of Chinese Protestantism.

However, this open approach has encountered serious practical issues. In the case of Shouwang church, it is difficult to keep both the church’s integrity and openness at the same time. Conducting Sunday services online may keep the church’s integrity as one single congregation, but the church’s openness is seriously weakened because Sunday services on the Internet must rely on somewhat unstable VPN services in order to access an overseas server. Thus, online Sunday services can hardly be noticed by the public. Besides Shouwang church, which was officially banned in March 2019 after years of online Sunday worship, other well-known churches like Jin Mingri’s Zion Church and Wang Yi’s Early Rain Covenant Church were banned in 2018. In terms of leadership, Jin Tianming has been under house arrest since 2011. Yu Jie went into exile in 2012. Wang Yi was arrested in 2018 and will probably face imprisonment. Sun Yi, although he managed to keep his post in Renmin University until his recent retirement, has been highly discreet in expressing his vision and open approach. With these events in view, the feasibility of practicing an open approach is called into question. For some time, it will remain a struggle between the readiness of the Christian’s ‘group conscience’ and social responsibility and an unready even suppressing context.

Apart from practical issues, advocates of Reformed theology, particularly Neo-Calvinism as represented by figures like Sun Yi, also face unresolved theoretical issues. Generally speaking, advocates of Reformed theology understand Reformed theology, the Puritan tradition and Presbyterian polity as biblically correct, intellectually enlightened, providing useful guidelines for public engagement and historically contributing to the formation of political democracy in the West, especially in the Netherlands and the U.S. However, in Europe and North America, Christianity has long been the dominant religion and a Christian heritage has been present in their culture and society for centuries. Before Neo-Calvinism could make any distinctive contribution, it developed from a soil that was well saturated with Christianity. While that has been the case in the West, China has been a very different context in which Christianity has never been a major religion. Many Chinese people still perceive Christianity as a foreign religion, and the state has a long-standing mentality of dominating social as well as religious life. The different Chinese context presents a tremendous challenge, even difficulty, for Chinese Christians to simply adopt Reformed theology, as historically developed in the West, not to mention the harshness even hostility against Christianity under the Communist regime in China.

Besides the above-mentioned basic difference, there are some serious unsolved issues, which may have been realised by some advocates of Reformed theology. The first issue is the relationship between a Reformed spirit and Chinese culture. Advocates of Reformed theology realise that what they propose is not simply a Presbyterian church polity, but more importantly, the spirit behind that polity. However, this Reformed spirit is understood in some way incompatible with some

values in Chinese culture, like face (*mianzi*), social status (*diwei*) and interpersonal relationships (*guanxi*).<sup>9</sup> These values may not be a problem in themselves, but they will become problematic when they are misused. Perhaps the incompatibility can be explained as a Reformed spirit of respecting substance versus Chinese value of protecting face, valuing the individual versus manipulating social status and relying on proper endeavour versus misusing interpersonal relationship. In this sense, a Reformed spirit can be critical of Chinese cultural values instead of trying to be compatible with it. Yet, when the incompatibility or tension exists between a Reformed spirit and Chinese culture, there have not been particular solutions. Even if a solution is proposed, it will need to go through a long process before it can produce any desired result. Meanwhile, it seems that the relationship between Reformed theology and Chinese culture receives only little or no attention among some of the advocates of Reformed theology. In proposing an open approach towards the wider Chinese society, neither Sun Yi, Wang Yi nor Yu Jie, have seriously addressed Chinese culture. Nonetheless, the advocates of Reformed theology, as well as the TSPM figure Wu Weiqing, seem to be successful in their theological reflections without addressing Chinese culture directly. They offer an alternative, either Reformed theology or a Christ-centred theology, to anything culturally Chinese, like the one proposed by Wang Weifan, who considers Christianity's adaptation to Chinese culture absolutely necessary. Perhaps the spread of Reformed theology points to a reality that, in the present Chinese society, Chinese culture is no longer as 'traditional' as Wang Weifan would describe, and an a-cultural Reformed theology is

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<sup>9</sup> Bruce P. Baugus, "'A Few Significant Ones': A Conversation with Two of China's Leading Reformers," in *China's Reforming Churches: Mission, Polity, and Ministry in the Next Christendom*, ed. Bruce P. Baugus (Grand Rapids: Reformation Heritage Books, 2014), 146-47.

rather valuable in the sense that it offers something that can better address the needs and issues in contemporary Chinese society.

The second unsolved issue for Chinese advocates of Reformed theology is their relationship with the house church tradition. Generally speaking, advocates of Reformed theology emerged from house churches, but Reformed theology, including a Presbyterian polity, has not been widely accepted or appreciated by Chinese Protestants. In this case, forming a formal Reformed denomination will in some ways distance the advocates of Reformed theology from many other house church Christians, and this is one reason that some advocates of Reformed theology are hesitant to form presbyteries.<sup>10</sup> Certainly, advocates of Reformed theology cannot take lightly their house church heritage and their relationship with other house church Christians.

The third issue is perhaps the direction of Reformed theology in China. It is noted that there has been a debate between a Neo-Calvinist transformative perspective and a Calvinist two kingdom's perspective in American Reformed theology. The former advocates concepts like common grace, the cultural mandate and the transformation of the current world, through the teachings of Cornelius Van Til at Westminster Theological Seminary (Philadelphia). The latter emphasises the co-existence of Christ's kingdom and the kingdom of the world and their interactive yet tensional relationship, through the teachings of David VanDrunen at Westminster Seminary California (Escondido). These two views seem to be going on in China as well, though it may not be in a form of debate. Sun Yi seems to be aligned with the transformative view as he tends to stress common grace and the cultural mandate,

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<sup>10</sup> Ibid., 143.

while Wang Yi seems to uphold a two-kingdoms view through the discussion in his ‘95 thesis.’<sup>11</sup> Both views seem to receive certain popularity among Chinese advocates of Reformed theology. However, it may become a concern in choosing one of the two views in the face of an increasingly repressive context. The transformative view seems to better suit a context of religious lenience, while it may be difficult to properly explain within a repressive context. Yet, it is a moderate approach towards a hostile context. The two-kingdoms view may better describe a repressive context and provide suitable guidelines. However, its explicit acknowledgement of the tension, even potential conflict, between the two kingdoms may sound radical and uncomfortable to the CCP, therefore drawing more severe oppression.

The above-mentioned are just some examples of theoretical issues. If the political context became lenient or even open in the future, these issues would still remain. Sun Yi, Wang Yi and Yu Jie may have a general idea concerning these issues, but they have done little to discuss it and have not proposed any solutions. Advocates of Reformed theology, or generally, advocates of an open approach, will need to address both Reformed theology and the social, cultural and ecclesiastical contexts in China. However, when major issues like the above-mentioned are solved, it may be hard to tell if Chinese Christians have developed a Chinese version of Reformed theology or something indigenously Chinese, which may be well beyond the range of Reformed theology.

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<sup>11</sup> Early Rain Covenant Church, ‘Women dui Jiating Jiaohui Lichang de Chongshen (95 Tiao)’ [Our Reaffirmation on the Stand of the House Church (95 Thesis)], *Shengming Jikan* [Life Quarterly] 75, (September 2015). CCLiFe, 5 October 2016, <https://www.cclife.org/View/Article/4248>. The ‘95 thesis’ was published online under the name of Early Rain Covenant Church in August 2015. Yet, it was widely referred to as ‘Wang Yi’s 95 Thesis.’

Wu Weiqing's Christ-centred theology basically includes his explanation of Christ and humans in sharp contrast with one another, the proposal of faith in Christ as the solution to socio-political issues and an ideal world of social justice intended by Christ. His elaboration of Christ and humans in sharp contrast seems to be a plain yet effective message for evangelism in the contemporary context of moral deterioration, considering the large and fast-growing membership of Haidian church. While this evangelising message seems effective, Wu has his emphasis on people's conversion, which will, according to Wu, lead to the establishment of an ideal world of social justice. Taking Wu's idea of a world full of the converted without social injustice, his faith-in-Christ solution makes sense. However, a mass conversion to Christianity, which may lead to the vast majority of the population in China becoming Christians, is Wu's assumption. As long as this remains an assumption, Wu's conversion-focused solution lacks an explanation concerning how Christians, as the minority in the society, may impact non-Christians, as the majority. One may suspect that Wu's discreetness in church ministry has led him to avoid an explanation in order to keep the church safe in the TSPM system. While this may be the case, this avoidance still inevitably causes serious deficiency in Wu's theological framework by leaving a vital question unanswered. Looking forward to further development of Wu's theology, an explanation should be expected, especially in an urban context in which many intellectual and white-collar Christians tend to look for an understanding for what they believe and do.

Wu's self-identify with the masses, concern for social justice and a view of post-millennialism present some features in common with liberation theology, although he does not employ that term. Both Bishop Ding Guangxun and Wang

Weifan once denied China's need of liberation theology. Yet later in the 2000s, Wang expressed concern about theology's role in addressing people's needs. It is Wu who explicitly points out social injustice and calls for a Christian response.

Nevertheless, Wu's approach towards social injustice differs from that of liberation theology as developed in South America. Generally speaking, liberation theology in South America undertakes a high-profile approach as theologians like Gustavo Gutiérrez of Peru, Leonardo Boff of Brazil and Juan Luis Segundo of Uruguay openly criticise social, political as well as ecclesial authorities for causing or being involved in social injustice. They explicitly call for political liberation of the oppressed and try to make their voices of liberation widely heard. In Wu's case, although he occasionally and carefully casts criticism against people and organisations that are responsible for social injustice, his focus is rather on helping the poor and the underprivileged through charity, social services and pastoral support. He does not seem to challenge the social status quo. However, his discreetness, or lack of boldness if you will, should be understood in its own context.

While South America has been a Christian-majority (Catholic) context, China is a Christian-minority context under the Communist regime, in which Wu places himself and his ministry under the TSPM. In this context, neither discussion on 'political liberation of the poor' nor condemnation of the powerful is tolerable by the TSPM or the CCP. Yet, Wu's concern for social justice is still valuable in the Chinese context. When social injustice becomes an open secret in society and public criticisms are rarely heard from individuals, social groups or organisations, Wu's message clearly spells out a remarkable Christian concern and an attitude of active engagement. His appeal for social justice also bears significance within the Christian

circle. While Wang Weifan intends to build a Chinese Christianity among noble person Christians and Sun Yi envisions a blueprint of church development for urban intellectual Christians, Wu plays another role by appealing for social justice on behalf of the common Christian and the masses.

Besides discreetness, Wu's approach towards the socio-political context also reveals a tactic of pragmatism. He complies with religious restrictions and avoids violation of any 'red line.' This compliance may weaken the church's independence and leave certain Christian principles in jeopardy of being compromised. Yet, compliance seem to be Wu's pragmatic tactic that helps the church survive under the Communist regime. The context has been increasingly suppressive in the second half of the 2010s, and the current political leadership demands a deeper level of allegiance and sinicisation of Christianity. It is foreseeable that a pragmatic approach will be employed more commonly, and to a greater extent, by some of the Three-Self church pastors. While that is expected, Wu does not explain much of his pragmatic approach, leaving alone his contradictory statements between 'God's kingdom first' and 'citizens of this country first' with suspicion or criticism. In view of this, a pragmatic approach such as Wu's will need to be explained as justifiable and on what basis it can be justified. An explanation may help to build some reasonable coherence in his theological framework and bring understanding and sympathy to his pragmatism. That being said, a question remains in terms of how far such pragmatism can go. For better or for worse, it may help a Three-Self church to survive in a suppressing context. However, when trying to satisfy a demanding regime, pragmatism will risk surrendering the prophetic role of Christianity, rendering the Christian faith as salt that loses its saltiness (Matt.5:13).



This chapter has discussed the CCP's increasing tight control over religion, society and politics in recent years, reflecting on representative figures' theologies and discussing how they may evolve in the future. Still, one should bear in mind the uncertainty of the future of the socio-political context. The current tight control seems to repeat the CCP's tactics in the late 1950s, or even during the Cultural Revolution. However, even though some may want to repeat history, history can never be the same after decades of evolution. On the one hand, while Xi Jinping seems to try to centralise personal power and control over the country, he does not have the prestige that Mao Zedong or Deng Xiaoping once had.<sup>12</sup> Besides, with the atrophy of Communist ideology, the CCP's rule is increasingly relying on economic sustainability and massive-scale 'maintenance of social stability' (*wei wen*) against social unrest. Apart from these unfavourable elements, China's increasing aggression in the globe and subsequent encounter of criticism and even conflict, like the trade war with the U.S., may bring the country into unpredictable even perilous circumstances. On the other hand, after decades of ups and downs of the Communist rule, the Chinese people have experienced a relatively open and lenient context, tasted the benefit of the Reform and Opening Up policy and many of them may have a broad perspective on what a civil society should look like. After decades of reform and exposure to the outside world, especially the West, the Chinese society has become significantly diverse in people's worldviews, interests and lifestyles. Likewise, Chinese Protestant Christianity has witnessed the rise of urban churches, growth of Christian intellectuals and diversity of theological interest. Under these

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<sup>12</sup> Whereas Mao was the founder of the PRC and Deng was the general designer of the Reform and Opening Up policy, Xi is not in a position to make any contribution that would give him any prestige like that of Mao or Deng.

circumstances, while a tightened political control may not be a surprise as something coming from the CCP, it is certainly moving against what the Chinese society has been moving towards.

It is not the goal here to predict the future of the politics in China, but a review of the latest political move helps one to reflect on the selected Evangelical figures' theologies and discuss how they may be evolving in the near future. The increasing hostility and oppression in recent years causes serious difficulty to the further development of their theologies, with particular reference to their socio-political approach. However, this difficulty cannot cause their theologies to reclaim the past. Instead, their theologies will be evolving from the present, which is an accumulation of what they have accomplished in the past four decades or so. Therefore, despite the difficulties in the present and the uncertainties of the future, the accomplishment of the representative figures' theologies will provide valuable insights for Chinese Protestants' quest for a socio-political approach in the Chinese context.

The present study follows primarily an approach of historical theology and focuses on select Evangelical church figures' theologies in their historical contexts. Its scope has limited it from exploring some practical areas like charity, social welfare and gender issues in Evangelicals' social engagement. Nevertheless, charity and social service were important aspects of the social engagement of both Wu Weiqing and Sun Yi. With regard to gender issues, Christian women, including those of the Evangelical tradition, have been closely involved in social engagement,

especially in areas like charity and social service.<sup>13</sup> Discussions on these practical areas will help to explain how far or how limited Evangelicals have been involved in these areas. They will also help to reveal how Evangelicals reflect their theology on a practical level. Thus, these practical areas are important and discussions on them can help to explain Evangelicals' theological reflection. However, discussions on these practical areas will require different sources of literature. The number of primary sources produced by women about Evangelical social engagement is far more limited, and other disciplines like sociology and ethnography may be needed to explore these discussions. Considering the wide scope to engage these topics, with different sources and even different disciplinary methods, it has not been practical to explore these areas in the present study. Nevertheless, other studies on these areas or topics will provide helpful information and insights on Evangelicals' socio-political approaches.

The present study has explored the contours of the evolution of Evangelical Christians' socio-political approaches from the 1980s to the 2010s. Yet it has focused on urban intellectual Evangelical theology. This focus has some advantages, such as access to sufficient resources and the ability to address the rise of urban churches. Nevertheless, the present study has necessarily been unable to examine another important dimension of experiential Evangelicals like those in the rural areas or those of the Pentecostal and charismatic traditions. With regard to Evangelicals in rural areas, their social concern is normally directed to issues related to the rural context, like lower living standards or poverty, education and upbringing of left-

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<sup>13</sup> Wielander gives examples of several female Christian figures' views and involvements in charity and social service in contemporary China. Wielander, 68-81.

behind children in absence of their parents who have migrated to urban centres to make a living. While their concern can be serious, their engagement may have been less effective or ineffective due to a shortage of resources, as most rural areas are marginalised in Chinese society. Concerning Pentecostals and charismatics, with emphases on the empowerment of the Holy Spirit and exercise of spiritual gifts, they may not hold social concern and engagement as important as the advocates of Reformed theology. However, there have been cases of Chinese Pentecostals' expressing patriotism through patriotic prayers, patriotic public relations and patriotic programs. Yet, these patriotic practices are mainly understood as both a strategy of engagement and one of survival in a hostile political context.<sup>14</sup> That said, to a certain degree, socio-political concern should have been present among Christians in rural areas and among those of Pentecostal and charismatic traditions. Their engagement and their theological reflections may not have reached an extent like one of the advocates of Reformed theology, or an urban TSPM Evangelical figure like Wu Weiqing. From a research point of view, it may also be difficult to find particular individuals among rural Evangelicals, Pentecostals or charismatics for case studies. Nevertheless, Christians in rural areas consist of a large portion of Chinese Evangelicals, and Christians of Pentecostal and charismatic traditions have their own strengths in spiritual vitality and have experienced fast church growth. While they all practice an Evangelical faith in an overall Chinese context, their socio-political concern and engagement will present another valuable picture, which

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<sup>14</sup> Karrie J. Koesel, 'China's Patriotic Pentecostals,' in *Global Chinese Pentecostal and Charismatic Christianity*, eds. Yang Fenggang, Joy K.C. Tong and Allan H. Anderson (Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2017), 240-56.

will also bear great significance in the study of Evangelicals' socio-political approaches in contemporary China.

Apart from a consideration on the socio-political engagement of Christians in rural areas and those of Pentecostal and charismatic traditions, the present study of urban Chinese Evangelicals' social engagement may also be understood in light of global Evangelicals' social engagement. It is noted that global Evangelicals' social concern and engagement started much earlier than that of Chinese Evangelicals, with the Lausanne Congress in 1974 and the subsequent Lausanne movement marking the move from refrainment of social concern to an active social engagement.<sup>15</sup> Global Evangelicals' move towards social concern may be partially due to their reflection and correction of their social indifference accompanied by their criticism and battle against liberals in the early 20<sup>th</sup> century. After World War II, the controversy declined and the Christians' attention led to increasing social issues, which caused increasing Evangelical social concern. Chinese Evangelicals took the step of social concern later than the global Evangelicals because of China's domestic context. In an authoritarian socialist state, Chinese Evangelicals paid attention to the survival of the church. It was not until the context became lenient from the 1980s and urban churches started rising that Chinese Evangelicals began to move towards social concern and engagement. Although being later than the global Evangelicals, the Chinese Evangelical's move towards social concern bears great significance in the sense that Chinese Evangelicals consist of a large part of the global Evangelical community. The Chinese Evangelical's theological reflections are produced in the

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<sup>15</sup> Brian Stanley, *The Global Diffusion of Evangelicalism* (Nottingham: Inter-Varsity Press, 2013), 151-79.

particular Chinese socialist context, therefore providing some particular insights that may not be found from other countries. With Chinese Evangelicals as a particular example, it may also explain how Evangelicalism may be understood according to its context.

The concluding chapter gives a summary of the findings in this thesis. It provides some concluding thoughts on the representative figures' theologies and discusses what their future prospects may be in view of the changing context in the second half of the 2010s. It also mentions the limitations of the present study as not exploring some practical areas of Evangelical social engagement and missing an important picture of the socio-political engagement of rural Christians and Pentecostal and charismatic Christians in China. It also briefly mentions the significance of Chinese Evangelicals' social engagement in the context of global Evangelicalism. It is hoped that the present study can be a stimulus for further studies in various fields like Chinese theology and Christianity, public theology, political theology and Evangelical theology.



## GLOSSARY

The following is a glossary of Chinese terms, phrases and titles of legal documents used in the present thesis. Each entry starts with the romanisation (*pin yin*) of the Chinese term, followed by its Chinese characters and then its English rendering.

*Aiguo-aijiao*. 爱国爱教. Love-Country-Love-Religion.

*Baihua*. 白话. vernacular

*Buxin pai*. 不信派. party of the unbelievers

*Changsheng shen*. 长生神. ever-generating God

*Chao shi*. 超世. transcend the world

*Cun yi*. 存异. reserving differences

*Da jiaohui*. 大教会. big church

*Da tong*. 大同. great harmony

*Dang ju zhe mi, pang guan zhe qing*. 当局者迷, 旁观者清. the onlooker sees most of the game

*Dao*. 道. the Word

*Diwei*. 地位. social status

*Fan/huai fenzi*. 反/坏分子. counter/bad element

*Fangzhou jiaohui*. 方舟教会. the Ark Church

*Fazhi*. 法治. rule of law



*Fei Jidujiao Xuesheng Tongmeng.* 非基督教学生同盟. Anti-Christian Student

Federation

*Fei Zongjiao Da Tongmeng.* 非宗教大同盟. Great Federation of Anti-Religionists

*Fu chu shui mian.* 浮出水面. rise to the surface

*Gongkai zhengti xing.* 公开整体性. openness and integrity

*Gongkai zhengti de jianzheng.* 公开整体的见证. open and integrated witness

*Gongkai zhengti de tanghui.* 公开整体的堂会. open and integrated church

*Guanxi.* 关系. interpersonal relationships

*Guanyu woguo shehui zhuyi shiqi zongjiao wenti de jiben guandian he jiben*

*zhengce.* 关于我国社会主义时期宗教问题的基本观点和基本政策. The

Basic Viewpoint and Policy on the Religious Questions during Our Country's

Socialist Period

*Guomin.* 国民. citizen

*Guo xue.* 国学. studies of ancient Chinese civilisation

*Hanyu shenxue.* 汉语神学. sino-theology

*Hexie shehui.* 和谐社会. harmonious society

*Hukou.* 户口. household residence

*Jiating jiaohui.* 家庭教会. house church

*Jiaomin.* 教民. people of religion

*Jiao zhang.* 交账. hand over the account

*Jiating juhui.* 家庭聚会. house fellowships

*Jian tang.* 建堂. obtain a church venue; build a church building

*Jidujiao wenhua.* 基督教文化. Christian culture

*Jidu lun.* 基督论. Christology

*Jidu ren.* 基督人. Christ-human

*Jidu xue.* 基督学. learning of Christ

*Jidutu junzi.* 基督徒君子. noble person Christian

*Jiu guo.* 救国. national salvation

*Jiuguo qingjie.* 救国情节. sentiment of national salvation

*Jiu shi.* 救世. save the world

*Junzi.* 君子. noble person

*Kaifang.* 开放. open

*Ku hai.* 苦海. abyss of misery

*Kui sun.* 亏损. loss

*Lianghui.* 两会. the two bodies of the Three-Self Patriotic Movement and the China

Christian Council

*Lingming shenxue.* 灵命神学. spiritual life theology

*Manyou shengling.* 满有圣灵. being full of the Holy Spirit

*Mianzi.* 面子. face

*Nei sheng wai wang.* 内圣外王. inward sagehood, outward kingship

*Neizai chaoyue.* 内在超越. inner transcendence

*Nongmin gong.* 农民工. peasant migrant worker

*Pingmin.* 平民. common people

*Qiu tong.* 求同. seeking the common ground

*Qiwu guan.* 齐物观. homogeneous view

*Qu gao he gua.* 曲高和寡. for those songs of a high pitch, there will be very few  
people who are able to join in the chorus

*Qunti.* 群体. community; group

*Qunti yishi.* 群体意识. group consciousness

*Renjian fojiao.* 人间佛教. Humanistic Buddhism

*Renmin tuanti.* 人民团体. people's organisation

*Ren shang ren.* 人上人. someone superior over other people

*Roushen cheng dao.* 肉身成道. the human flesh comes to the Word

*Ru shi.* 入世. engage with the world

*Sanzi jiaohui.* 三自教会. Three-Self church

*Shang fa zai wo.* 赏罚在我. my reward and punishment are with me

*Shanshang de cheng, shishang de guang.* 山上的城, 世上的光. a city on a hill; a  
light to the world

*Shanshang zhi cheng.* 山上之城. a city set on a hill

*Shashen yi chengren, sheshen yi quyi.* 杀身以成仁, 舍身以取义. dying to preserve  
virtue and sacrificing to achieve justice

*Shen de guo.* 神的国. the kingdom of God

*Sheng.* 生. Life

*Sheng er bu you, wei er bu shi, gong cheng er fu ju.* 生而不有，为而不恃，功成而

弗居. the development of things is not aimed at status or remaining the same;

therefore, when a mission is accomplished and a context changed, the best

choice is retreat

*Shenghuo.* 生活. daily life

*Shengling chongman.* 圣灵充满. being filled with the Holy Spirit

*Shengming.* 生命. spiritual life

*Shengsheng shen.* 生生神. ever-generating God

*Shengsheng shenxue.* 生生神学. ever-generating theology

*Shenxue de pinkun.* 神学的贫困. the distress of theology

*Shequn xing.* 社群性. sociality

*Shidai de yixiang.* 时代的异象. vision of the time

*Shi yi changji yi zhi yi.* 师夷长技以制夷. learning from the foreigners' technology in  
order to handle the foreigners

*Si er fuhuo.* 死而复活. wake up from death

*Tian.* 天. heaven

*Tian guo.* 天国. the kingdom of heaven

*Tian ren heyi.* 天人合一. unity of heaven and humanity

*Tianxia xingwang, pifu youze.* 天下兴亡, 匹夫有责. every man has a duty for his  
country

*Tiaoru kuhai qu zhengjiu zhengsheng.* 跳入苦海去拯救众生. jumping into abyss of  
misery to rescue the masses

*Ta li.* 他力. other power

*Wei renmin fuwu.* 为人民服务. serving the people

*Wei wen.* 维稳. maintenance of social stability

*Wenhua shiminig.* 文化使命. cultural mandate

*Wenhua suyang.* 文化素养. cultural level

*Wenhua xinli.* 文化心理. cultural psychology

*Women shiren.* 我们世人. we as people in the world

*Wuxu bianfa.* 戊戌变法. Wuxu Reform

*Xin pai.* 新派. new school

*Xin rujia.* 新儒家. New Confucianism

*Yangwu pai.* 洋务派. group of officials advocating Westernisation

*Yangwu yundong.* 洋务运动. Westernisation Movement

*Yifa zhiguo.* 依法治国. rule by law

*Yin yang.* 阴阳. yin yang (the two opposing principles in nature; the former being feminine or negative, and the latter being masculine or positive)

*Yili.* 义理. essential principles

*Yi tianxia wei jiren.* 以天下为己任. taking the responsibility of the world

*Yu da yuzhou tong huxi.* 与大宇宙同呼吸. breathing with the vast universe

*Yuzhou de jidu.* 宇宙的基督. the cosmic Christ

*Yuzhou zhenli.* 宇宙真理. universal truth

*Yuzhou zhi zhu he lishi zhi zhu.* 宇宙之主和历史之主. the Lord of the cosmos and the Lord of history

*Zheng nengliang.* 正能量. positive energy

*Zhongguo chuantong wenhua.* 中国传统文化. traditional Chinese culture

*Zhongguo da renwen xuewen.* 中国大人文学问. great Chinese humanistic learning

*Zhongguo Jidujiao Xiehui.* 中国基督教协会. China Christian Council

*Zhongguo wenhua.* 中国文化. Chinese culture

*Zhongguo xuewen.* 中国学问. Chinese learning

*Zhonghua renmin gongheguo jingnei waiguoren zongjiao huodong guanli guiding.*

中华人民共和国境内外国人宗教活动管理规定. Rules on the

Administration of Religious Activities of Foreigners within the Territory of

the People's Republic of China

*Zhonghua Shenggonghui.* 中华圣公会. Chinese Anglican Church

*Zhongxue wei ti, xixue wei yong.* 中学为体, 西学为用. Chinese values as the

backbone, Western technology as the management

*Zhong yong.* 中庸. moderation

*Zhu zi bai jia.* 诸子百家. the Hundred Schools of Thought

*Zongjiao huodong changsuo guanli tiaoli.* 宗教活动场所管理条例. Regulations on

the Administration of Places and Sites for Religious Activities

*Zongjiao shiwu tiaoli.* 宗教事务条例. Regulation on Religious Affairs



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